

# **The Employment of Immigrants in New Zealand: The Attitudes, Policies, Practices and Experiences of Employers**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report presents the results of a mixed method study involving a postal survey of 246 employers and a follow-up unstructured in-depth interview with a sub-set of 19 participants, conducted as part of the New Settlers Programme at Massey University. The objectives of the survey were to describe the characteristics of the immigrant workforce and the employing companies, to describe the perspectives of employers, and to identify practices and policies of companies in relation to immigrant employees. Participants in the interviews raised any issue they wished, and were probed for their views on how recent immigrants can make themselves more employable, on company initiatives to facilitate the settling in of an immigrant employee, and the particular assets that immigrant employees bring to their employing companies.

## Results of the survey

- 70.3 per cent of companies did employ immigrants, but not in large numbers: In 86.6 per cent of companies, immigrants contributed up to 25 per cent of the workforce only. Companies of all industry categories employed immigrants with the larger companies more likely to employ higher numbers. Companies with nation-wide and especially international business activities were more likely to employ immigrants.
- More male than female immigrants were employed. 47.6 percent were employed in skilled occupations (managerial, professional and skilled trade), and 52.7 per cent in less skilled occupations (clerical, semi-skilled and unskilled). Full-time employment was the norm.
- 65.3 per cent were reported to be using their pre-migration qualifications (19.2 per cent were not), and almost half were advancing their qualifications in New Zealand.
- 98.1 percent of employers reported that the English language of immigrant employees was adequate for the job; 33.7 per cent were also advancing English skills through tuition. In addition, 89.7 percent of the immigrant employees mixed socially with other employees, and 88.5 per cent of other employees mixed with immigrant employees. 65.5 per cent of immigrant employees also participated to a moderate or significant extent in the workplace. Results indicate that employment of immigrants where English is not the first language does not impose particular burdens on employers, and/or that employers do not make special provision for this population: only 17.3 per

cent of companies used an interpreter to assist in explanations to immigrant employees and 19.2 per cent provided written material in immigrant employees' native languages.

- Employers reported positive views on immigrant employees. 28.7 per cent responded they worked harder or more diligently than other employees, and 48.3 per cent at about the same level; only 1.1 per cent said they worked less hard. This perspective was supported by numerous added comments about the benefits of employing immigrants and about their work ethic.
- When recruiting, employers were strongly influenced by New Zealand work experience (33.7 per cent) and qualifications (27.4 per cent); only 5.1 and 5.7 per cent respectively responded that these had no influence. 24.9 per cent of employers recruited immigrants to meet labour shortages. 95.9 per cent of employers had no company policy regarding the recruitment of immigrants.
- Similarly, few companies had policies and practices to support immigrants once employed: 7.3 per cent provided mentoring systems, 7.7. per cent offered coaching or training to supervisors of immigrant employees, 3.7 per cent translated company manuals and policies into employees' languages, 14.2 per cent offered training to immigrant employees and 11.8 per cent supported English language tuition. Some respondents added that such support that did exist was offered to all employees.

## **Findings of in-depth interviews**

- The interviews complemented the survey results and added considerably to the experiences of employers in relation to immigrant employees. Overall employers expressed very positive experiences in employing immigrants, and were particularly appreciative of their skills, performance, work ethic, and the richness of greater diversity. Some described their growing dependence on immigrants to supply needed skills.
- In addition, other benefits accrued to companies that employed immigrants: networks and contacts in overseas places of previous employment; language and cultural skills; improved capacity to meet the needs of a diverse customer base; contributing to the skill and knowledge base; positive attitudes to work and to employers.
- At the same time, participants were very focused on characteristics that became barriers to employing immigrants. Those discussed most extensively were: English language and communication; cultural and organisational fit;

fears that an immigrant might disrupt the workplace because of cultural differences (e.g. a dictatorial manner, working harder than Kiwis); not having New Zealand work experience and qualifications; the greater difficulty in verifying work experience; being over-qualified; a perceived risk of an employee leaving- for a better job, a preferred New Zealand or overseas location, a return to the home country.

- When recruiting, employers described a sense of responsibility that led them to take a path of least resistance and minimize risk when hiring that, in practice, discriminated against an immigrant job seeker competing with New Zealanders. Employers were also put off by some of the tactics used by immigrants, including unfocused CVs, cold calling, and requests to work in a voluntary capacity or at a lower level than credentials deserved.
- Advice on how immigrants can improve employability were numerous and included: having the correct permits to work; having verified qualifications, comparability of prior work experience and work references; working on improving English; preparation for a particular application by researching the company and position, focusing the CV accordingly, and using a CV format familiar to New Zealand employers; and interview presentation and skills.
- Once employed, few companies offered support to immigrants, and some of the initiatives described were offered to all employees, not only immigrants. Support included: pastoral care, especially for immigrants recruited directly from overseas; accommodating religious and cultural requirements through flexible contracts; support for English language tuition.

## **Recommendations**

- Appropriate employment is a requirement to support the settlement of immigrants. However, this study highlights the presence of strong barriers to the employment of immigrants. Employer aversion to employing immigrants needs to be addressed through a combination of policies that reduce the perceived risk (because of unfamiliarity) of employing immigrants and other incentives to their employment. These can be strengthened with complementary initiatives designed to educate employers on the benefits of diversity by employing immigrants and to reduce employer resistance.
- Further research is needed in relation to the labour market, employers and workplaces to determine the extent, nature and dimensions of what appears to be systematic disadvantages faced by immigrants in the labour market. Research is needed also to identify policies and practices that effectively

reduce barriers to immigrants and which support diversity. Noting that participants highlighted concerns about communication, comparability of qualifications and prior work experience, research is also needed to determine the significance of differences between New Zealand and immigrant employees for productivity.



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# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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To introduce the study, recent literature on immigrant employment is reviewed, beginning with a brief introduction to New Zealand immigration policy in relation to economic imperatives. Then an extended review of New Zealand and a limited commentary on international literature highlights the ongoing difficulties recent immigrants encounter in securing suitable employment. Finally, the small available literature on immigrants from an employer perspective is reviewed.

## **Recent immigration policy**

New Zealand immigration policy and flows have historically reflected a relationship between immigration and economic conditions, on the one hand, and immigration and social cohesion on the other. Thus, until the mid-1980s New Zealand immigration policy encouraged immigration from traditional source countries, that is, Britain, and from the 1960s, the Pacific, and delivered migrants who would both reflect New Zealand society and provide needed labour. The volume of immigrants and the regulation of flows varied according to economic conditions (StatisticsNZ, 1999). The last twenty years has seen a major shift in immigration policy parallel to other similar destination countries (e.g. Canada and Australia). While this shift has been in the contexts of demographic ageing of the population and declining birthrates, and as part of a larger process of deregulation and liberalisation of the economy, it has also reflected a global competition for skill to fuel economic growth and international competitiveness.

Since 1991 when the points system was introduced (Trlin, 1997. p.5), immigration policy has encouraged an inflow of highly qualified and skilled young immigrants from non-traditional sources, i.e. from countries other than the U.K. and Europe, with the expectation that they would contribute to New Zealand, economically and socially, and settle well (see Trlin, 1986, 1992, 1997; StatisticsNZ, 1999). Higher qualifications brought to a country by recent immigrants that increase the overall skill level in society are, in principle, expected to improve productivity, income and living standards across society. Much has been written about the potential gains for New Zealand from increased immigration, such as: access to skills and knowledge not available in New Zealand; access to international contacts; the opening up of trade opportunities; access to investment capital; economies of scale as the population increases; and facilitation and encouragement of cultural diversity (e.g. Kerr, 1997; Mendoza, 1997; Ip, 1997; Yeabsley, 1997).

However, Pool and Bedford (1997), Ip (1997) and others have argued that the potential benefits of immigration are not being achieved, largely because of New

Zealanders' perceptions of immigrants. Noting that many of the criticisms are directed towards the large numbers of Asian immigrants, they suggest that these problems stem from the fact that New Zealand has been left ill-equipped to deal with arrivals from these non-traditional sources because of the historical emphasis on immigration from the UK. Arising from negative reactions across society to a large influx of non-traditional immigrants, social commentators have focused on the need to address important and emerging social consequences of immigration together with the economic issues and benefits (Trlin, 1997; Yeabsley, 1997).

## **Employment of immigrants**

One of these important social issues has been the severe difficulties many immigrants encounter in finding suitable employment, indeed, any employment (Boyer, 1998; Department of Internal Affairs, 1996; Firkin, 2004; Ho and Lidgard, 1997; Lidgard, 1996; Pio, 2005; Trlin, Henderson and North, 1999, 2004; and others). As a result, New Zealand's unpreparedness for the influx of skilled immigrants has led to the subsequent underemployment and unemployment of highly talented individuals (Ip, 1995, Lidgard, 1996; Ip, 1997). Reasons suggested for this phenomenon include delays in accessing suitable positions due to the need to first gain local work experience and/or undertake further study, and the general demands of resettlement and integration into society. Moreover, immigrants are frequently unable to find jobs in the areas for which they are qualified, for reasons including qualifications (they are either overqualified or their qualifications are not recognised in New Zealand), and their lack of familiarity with the English language as spoken in New Zealand (Barnard, 1996; Department of Internal Affairs, 1996; Firkin, 2004; Lidgard, 1996; Trlin, Henderson, North, 1998, 2004; StatisticsNZ 2004; see also New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004, p.86). North and Trlin (2004) found that barriers to participating in the labour market were one reason (there were other reasons) for self-employment among immigrants.

The plight of unemployed immigrants is also reflected in the media, with headlines like "Myths and realities of moving country" (*National Business Review*, 6 November 1998); "Employers treat immigrants unfairly" (*Dominion*, 17 November 1999); "When the melting pot doesn't work"; "The land of missed opportunity"; "Why workers New Zealand needs feel unwanted" (*Dominion Post*, 19 September 2002, 30 August 2003, 8 November 2005); "Immigrants feel rejected" (*New Zealand Herald*, 24 September 2005). While media coverage of immigration issues has been criticized for its inaccuracy and sensationalism, among others (see Spoonley and Trlin, 2004, p. 10), the stories reflected those cited in reported research above, and show that the response of employers to immigrants is not improving as New Zealand's exposure to non-traditional immigrants increases. The stories are typical: highly skilled and experienced people are unable to get an interview, let alone a job, and what jobs they

do get are low skilled (taxi driving, working in fast food outlets etc). Even a rare positive headline, "New Zealand meets immigrant's expectation" (*Waikato Times* 2 July 2005), referred to success only after a Chinese person (with good English who had completed a second degree in New Zealand) had first experienced numerous non-responses and rejections to applications. Further, it is not only people without proficient English who are affected: as well as Chinese and those from Middle East countries, the stories of immigrants from South Africa, Eastern and Western Europe were told. Many had been educated in English including at universities in Britain.

Examples of discrimination against an applicant whose first language is not English and/or speaks English with an accent different from New Zealand English are recurrent in the media with headlines like "The right accent can win the job" and "Bias against accents rife" (e.g. *Dominion Post*, 16 April 2003, *New Zealand Herald*, 13 September 2005). Media reports reflect a concern that frequently emerges in the literature concerning the employment of new immigrants: the immigrants' grasp of the English language. In New Zealand, a report prepared by Forsyte Research (1998) concluded that insufficient English was associated with difficulties in finding employment and performing well in employment interviews. Similarly, the High Hopes survey (Department of Internal Affairs, 1996) found that a confident grasp of English was instrumental in improving job prospects and securing a job in the field in which the immigrant was qualified. And analysis of census data came to the same conclusion (StatisticsNZ, 2004). Additional factors are a concern to preserve workplace harmony, a growing concern that immigrant employees should understand safety policies and procedures, and that businesses are legally liable for ensuring that understanding is adequate (Crowe, 2005).

Significant differences between labour force participation, unemployment, income etc. between overseas and local-born add weight to the view that skills are not used appropriately (Borowski, 1993). An explanation for this state of affairs is that there are significant differences between overseas and local employees: for example, there are differential values attached to whether qualifications and work experience were gained locally or overseas, to language proficiency, and to familiarity with the local environment. A competing explanation is that immigrants are structurally disadvantaged: their ethnicity and/or culture results in systematic discrimination (Borowski, 1993; Miller and Neo, 1997). Research into how immigrants fare in the labour market and the appropriate use of their skills contribute to an understanding of whether skills are indeed different or if difficulties reflect discriminatory practices.

Research that has been conducted does indeed underline the disadvantage of immigrants in the labour market, a disadvantage that is more pronounced in the case of non-traditional immigrants from non-English speaking countries. Moreover immigrant labour participation rates and unemployment had deteriorated between the 1986 and 1996 census periods (Winkelmann and Winkelmann, 1998). Coinciding

with a rapid and large increase in skilled immigration, an analysis of census data (StatisticsNZ, 1999) revealed trends in recent immigrants' labour force performance: excluding working aged (15-64 years) persons who were not participating in the workforce (e.g. they were caring for dependents or studying), 16.8 per cent of recent immigrants were unemployed, compared with 7.5 per cent of New Zealand-born. Noting the recent large increases in populations from non-traditional sources, unemployment rates in the 1996 and 2001 census was highest among these populations, particularly those from (in order) North Africa, the Middle East, North-East Asia and southern and central Asia (StatisticsNZ, 2002, 2004). This was in spite of recent immigrants being more likely to hold a degree than New Zealand-born (StatisticsNZ, 2004; Boyd, 2002). Furthermore, in every occupational group, recent immigrants were more likely to hold a degree, and this pattern also occurred in low skilled occupations, indicating underemployment (StatisticsNZ, 1999).

StatisticsNZ (1999, p.48) noted that "while it is generally expected that higher qualifications will create better employment opportunities, this does not appear to be the case for recent immigrants". Although advanced qualifications do not have as great a moderating effect on unemployment and under-employment for immigrants as for local born, nor for immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds compared with those from English speaking countries, nevertheless higher qualifications still confer advantages to recent immigrants over those with no or low qualifications (StatisticsNZ, 1999; 2004). Boyd (2002) concluded from an analysis of census data that while immigrant employment rates had improved, rates were lower for those from non-English speaking countries and their income levels were lower. Data shows that unemployment rates steadily declined as the period of residency increases; unemployment is highest in the first year of residency, and highest labour force participation in New Zealand for recent immigrants occurred after about 8 years residence, leading to StatisticsNZ (2004) identifying length of residence as a key variable in immigrant employment (see also StatisticsNZ, 1999; Trlin, Henderson, North, 2004).

The under-utilisation of immigrant skills is not unique to New Zealand. Miller and Neo (1997) describe similar patterns among immigrants to Australia, and note that these in turn are similar to those of other major destination countries. An analysis in the UK showed that while white immigrant males demonstrate transitory disadvantage compared with the native-born, non-White immigrant males never achieve employment equality (Price, 2001). Educational level, family characteristics and country of birth moderate these trends to some extent. Boyd and Thomas (2001) reported that in Canada, when Canadian educated engineers are compared with immigrants qualified overseas in engineering, the overseas trained were least likely to be employed, and when employed were less likely to be in managerial or technical occupations, and more likely to be in unrelated occupations. In the USA, qualifications initially did not benefit immigrant employment status to the same

extent as local born, though employment rates soon caught up; that study did not analyse whether employment was in the appropriate occupation (Chiswick, Cohen and Zach, 1997). Other studies claim that in the USA, Asians do experience discrimination in the labour market, for example not being able to get jobs, being employed at lower levels and pay, denied promotion, subject to “English-only” rules in hiring and in the workplace, and the like (Dong and Kleiner, 1999). Van Tubergen, Mass and Flap (2004) examined labour market participation and the employment of immigrants in 18 countries, including three classic immigration destinations (Australia, Canada and the USA) and new destinations, all European countries. Reasons for the differences across countries were seen as multiple: the effects of origin and the destination of immigrants and the relationship between the two countries all played a role, as did discrimination against a particular ethnic group, size of an immigrant community in the destination country (reflecting advantages of social capital) and a range of personal characteristics such as religion and political contexts.

In Australia, as in New Zealand, qualifications did not confer the same advantage on immigrant job seekers and employees as was the case for local born, and for immigrants from non-English speaking countries there was even less advantage (Miller and Neo, 1997; StatisticsNZ, 1999); these differences did not rapidly reduce in Australasia as has been reported in the USA. A comparative study of immigrant employment in Canada, the USA, New Zealand and Switzerland revealed that there appears to be a bias against non-White immigrants in New Zealand (Khan, 2004). Using the International Adult Literacy Skills instrument, the study showed that in all countries, cognitive skills were lower among immigrants than “natives”, but these differences were smallest in New Zealand; furthermore, years of schooling for immigrants in Canada and New Zealand were greater than for “natives”. However, employment of male immigrants in the USA was no different from “natives”, but in Canada and especially New Zealand the male immigrant employment levels were lower. Ethnicity data was available for USA and New Zealand only, and while in the USA, ethnicity had no effect on immigrant employment, the effect was significant in New Zealand.

Experiencing barriers to participation in the labour market have several important impacts on immigrants. First, the immigrants themselves suffer psychologically and emotionally (e.g. Department of Labour, 1996; North, Singh and Trlin, 1999; Pio, 2005). Another outcome of employment difficulties is the economic status of recent immigrants. Zodgekar (1997) has found that immigrants from traditional source English-speaking countries such as the UK, Europe, and North America had much higher incomes than immigrants from the Pacific Islands and Asia (see also StatisticsNZ, 1999). There are also negative indirect impacts, as immigrants who are perceived as recipients of but not contributors to society and public services and receive income support become targets of politicians’ and society’s wrath, often

reflected in negative media debates (e.g. *Sunday Star Times*, 18 August 2002; *Dominion Post*, 23 June 2004; 8 September 2005). Unemployed immigrants have also been blamed for raising unemployment statistics and denting business confidence (*Dominion Post*, 8 November 2002).

## **Employer perspectives on immigrant employment**

While experiences of immigrants seeking employment are well-documented and consistently point to the under-utilisation of immigrant skills, it is not possible to second guess the reasoning and decision-making of employers who ultimately do, or do not, accept immigrant skills. At the time of conducting the study, there have been few studies conducted in New Zealand, and overseas, that examined the issue of employing immigrants from the point of view of the employer. Subsequently, there have been a few Government-initiated studies into employer perspectives, and these are briefly reviewed below.

Over the years, several commentators have suggested that the host country needs to be more prepared to facilitate the settlement and integration of new immigrants, and particularly immigrants from non-traditional sources, into society including the labour market (Greif, 1995; Lidgard, 1996; Ip, 1997; Koh, 1997). Writers have argued that there is a pressing need for the government to invest resources in assisting the integration and settlement of the immigrants they have attracted to help New Zealand (e.g. Lidgard, 1996; Ip, 1997; Yeabsley, 1997; Koh, 1997; Barnard, 1996). Responding to these concerns, in 2003, the Department of Labour launched an initiative in the context of a skills shortage that could be met by immigrants, by addressing immigration and settlement processes (Wallis, 2006a). Furthermore, in the light of documented on-going difficulties encountered by immigrants in participating in the labour market and in other aspects of society, other recent policy initiatives have addressed social cohesion as a basis for settlement policy for recent immigrants. These issues are interconnected, as an identified barrier to social cohesiveness is the recognition of qualifications and skills (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004; Peace, Spoonley, Butcher and O'Neil, 2005). As will be seen below, being unfamiliar with qualifications and experience, along with English language differences, are frequently used by employers as reasons for not employing immigrants. A key issue in settlement policy, therefore, is employment appropriate to qualifications and skills (Peace et al, 2006).

While assistance with settlement is important for immigrants, such assistance can be provided by government and non-government bodies, for example ethnic councils and local governments. One such joint initiative is the New Kiwis scheme between government and the Chamber of Commerce, launched in 2001, that allows for recent immigrants to get work experience (and have wages covered by government) at no



cost to businesses (see Immigration Services website). Another regional Chamber of Commerce was considering initiatives to address a skills shortage such as working with the city to make it attractive to immigrants, hold functions for immigrants and so forth (*Waikato Times*, 23 September 2005; see also *Evening Standard*, 21 January 2005 for a description of a civic lunch for immigrant job seekers and employers). Initiatives are appearing from non-government agencies and recruitment agencies to address the integration of recent immigrants into the workplace and reduce employer barriers to immigrants (see Office of Ethnic Affairs, 2002; EEO Trust, 2000; The Hudson Report, 2006). Other initiatives involved skilled immigrants improving conversational and colloquial English, including interview skills, gaining additional certification if needed, work experience and had been effective in gaining jobs for some participants (*Evening Standard*, 25 March 2003; *Dominion Post*, 6 July 2005).

Frequently, immigrants are unable to demonstrate their worth as applicants because they do not get as far as the interview stage. The few studies of employer perspectives indicate discriminatory practices when recruiting to the disadvantage of immigrant applicants. The earliest was in 1998 (Benson-Rea, Hayworth and Rawlinson, University of Auckland Business School), and showed that although seven in ten employers experienced a skills shortage that local supply did not meet, more than half had not considered recruiting from the pool of skilled immigrants. Of those who had employed immigrants, four in ten required immigrant employees to acquire local qualifications and a third started work in a lower level position. Reported barriers to employment for immigrants were deficiencies in communication and English fluency, interpersonal skills, New Zealand work experience and cultural differences (Benson-Rea et al, 1998). In the eight years since that study was done, the large recruitment agency Hudson highlighted concern over continuing employer resistance to immigrants, even in the midst of a critical skills shortage and an increasingly global market in skills (The Hudson Report, 2006). A survey of 1705 employers indicated that eight in ten believe there are barriers to immigrants participating in the workforce, and this held true across all industry sectors and regions. Employers identified non-technical skills as the most common challenge for immigrants, but only 8 per cent thought technical skills challenged immigrants.

The attitudes of employers to immigrant applicants are reflected in a survey of recent immigrants' settlement experiences. The results showed that while employment experiences were not included as a reason for liking New Zealand, between 10 and 15 per cent of respondents identified employers' wanting New Zealand job experience, lack of jobs and poor employment conditions as reasons for disliking New Zealand (Wallis, 2006b). Recurrent media reports also highlight the discrimination immigrants from non-traditional source countries face. The *Waikato Times* (30 September 2005) reported on the results of a survey conducted by the local Chamber of Commerce in which nearly two-thirds said poor communication skills

put them off; some suggested government-funded workplace training and trial contracts. However another local survey in Christchurch revealed that 41 per cent of Christchurch employers would refuse to employ immigrants even if incentives, subsidies and support were offered (*The Press*, 27 October 2004).

A study (Immigration Research Services, 2003) surveyed employers who had given a job offer to potential immigrants. A favouring of immigrants from English-speaking countries was apparent, and over half were to applicants from Europe, South Africa and North America (the so-called ESANA countries), while a high proportion of those without job offers were from Asian countries, in particular India. The most common reason for offering a job to an immigrant was that a local applicant was not available, and successful immigrant applicants were those with “the right attitude”. Once in the job, however, employer satisfaction with performance was very high at 88 per cent, and 93 per cent said they would hire an immigrant again. High satisfaction with immigrant employees was echoed in a 2005 study (Wallis, 2006a). Reasons for satisfaction included the fact that the employee had the right skills, the “right attitude”, and performed at a higher level than expected and when compared with other employees. In addition, employers were positive about added values: they supplied skills not available in New Zealand, and raised organisational expertise, knowledge and innovativeness. English language difficulties, where present, did not affect job performance.

Persistent employer negativity toward employing immigrants has emerged as a key reason why recent skilled immigrants feel they are discriminated against. These experiences have become a leading cause for complaints to the Race Relations Office, in particular that they lack New Zealand work experience and language skills (*East & Bays Courier*, 27 July 2001). The EEO Trust agreed (*Independent*, 24 November 1999 p.34), and like the Hudson report (2006) criticized employers for discriminating against immigrants (along with older workers and other non-traditional labour pools). The *National Business Review* (23 January 2004) quoted a consulting firm as saying that almost all unemployed Chinese and Korean immigrants in the IT area could get jobs “if employers got over their xenophobic attitudes”. A number of correspondents also claimed that these discriminatory attitudes are an explanation for New Zealand’s low productivity. Discriminatory practices were highlighted in a recent classroom study involving 350 managers and professionals (MBA students) who were asked to rate 18 fictional CVs for a position; all fictional applicants were fluent in English and more than qualified for the job. The study found that mention of immigrant status and having an Indian and especially a Chinese name penalized the applicant. The researcher Marie Wilson concluded that employers are prejudiced against colour and ethnicity, and cover their prejudice with excuses about English and culture (reported in *New Zealand Herald*, 2 April 2005).

The present study reports on an important but under-researched perspective on the issue of international migration, that of employers with respect to employing immigrants. Practices and policies developed by businesses, also researched, will be reported separately. The present study adds to previous research in that employer experiences with immigrants representing a range of skills from unskilled through to highly skilled, are reported whereas other New Zealand studies have investigated only a single industry (e.g. IT) or skilled migrants only. The study also adds to the few previous surveys of employers in its complementary in-depth interviews that allowed an insight into decision-making processes employers engaged in when recruiting that resulted in discrimination against immigrant applicants from non-English speaking countries. This was in spite of a high overall satisfaction with immigrant employees expressed by employers.

# METHODOLOGY

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In the context of New Zealand as a destination for skilled migrants along with reported difficulties in migrants securing suitable employment, a postal survey was conducted in the latter half of 1998, with the aim of better understanding attitudes, practices, policies and the experiences of New Zealand employers regarding immigrants. The survey was followed up during 1999 with personal interviews with those who indicated their interest and willingness to further discuss the employment of immigrants.

A specially designed and pilot-tested questionnaire comprising 43 structured and open-ended questions (see Appendix) was sent to 640 businesses in Auckland and Wellington, excluding businesses identified as major exporters to countries where languages other than English are spoken, and which were participating in a complementary study (see Watts and Trlin, 1999). Businesses selected included all those listed in the 'Top 500 Companies' database, with the balance randomly selected from current business listings in the Yellow Pages. The study was approved by the Massey University Research Ethics Committee. Of the 640 sent out, 29 questionnaires were returned undelivered, yielding a sample of 611, of which after one reminder, 246 responses were received, giving a response rate of just over 40 per cent. A number of recipients who declined to participate gave reasons including: they employed no immigrants at present, ethnicity data was not recorded, and the burden on companies of completing surveys. The specific objectives of the survey were:

- To describe the characteristics of the immigrant workforce and the companies employing them;
- To determine employers' perceptions and experiences of immigrant employees; and
- To describe the development of immigrant-related policy by businesses.

Respondents were asked to focus on immigrants from countries other than the UK and Australia, the main source countries historically, partly because of difficulties for employers in distinguishing these from their New Zealand counterparts. Other than these exclusions, no distinctions were made between established populations of immigrant employees (such as from the Pacific Islands) and the "new wave" of highly qualified immigrants (such as from Asian countries). The immigrant employee population described in this paper therefore covers a broad spectrum of the category "immigrant".

Survey respondents were invited to participate in a follow-up interview to further explore issues. Nineteen employers, all of whom did employ immigrants, agreed to

the interview, and these were conducted at a time and place (in all cases the business premises) convenient to the participant. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The interviews were unstructured and participants could raise the issues important to them and that they wished to discuss. The following questions were also put to participants and explored in the interviews:

- What can recent immigrants, particularly skilled professionals, do to make themselves more employable? In particular, how can recent immigrants gain New Zealand work experience often preferred by employers?
- What can a company do to facilitate the settling in of an immigrant employee, to enable the company and employee to benefit?
- What are the particular assets that immigrant employees can bring to their employing companies?

The results of the study are reported in two sections. First, the survey results are reported in tables and text. Results expressed as a per cent have been rounded to one decimal point. Not all of the 246 respondents answered every question in the questionnaire (non-response to questions was a specified right of the respondent). The results presented below reflect the percent of completed responses for each question (number of responses is stated), not the percent of 246 respondents, unless indicated. Comments added to the questionnaires are included. The survey results are presented in four sections:

1. Profile of businesses and CEO/Manager that responded
2. Profile of the immigrant workforce
3. Perceptions of immigrants as employees
4. Practices and policies of businesses in relation to immigrant workers

Then the qualitative interviews are reported thematically. There are four broad themes and these are:

1. Use of immigrant skills and benefits to the company
2. Barriers to employing immigrants
3. The burden of recruiting
4. How job seekers and companies can improve immigrant employment

## RESULTS OF POSTAL SURVEY

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Of the 246 businesses that returned a completed questionnaire, 70.3 per cent did currently employ immigrants, while 29.7 percent did not currently employ immigrants (*not including* immigrants from the UK and Australia) - see Table 1.

**Table 1: Responses to question: “Do you currently employ/have immigrants on your payroll?”**

	No.	%
Yes	173	70.3
No	73	29.7
Total	246	100

As shown in Table 2, in those businesses that employed immigrants, the overall proportion of a workforce made up of immigrants was low, with 68 per cent of businesses estimating that up to 10 percent of their workforce was comprised of immigrants (over one-third of this group indicated that immigrants made up no more than 1-2 per cent of the workforce). Of the remaining businesses that employed immigrants, in 18.6 per cent of businesses, immigrants made up 11-25 per cent of the workforce, and in only 13.4 per cent did they exceed 25 per cent of the workforce.

**Table 2: Employment of immigrants as a proportion of the company's workforce**

	No.	% of responses
1-10 percent	117	68
11-25 percent	32	18.6
26-100 percent	23	13.4
Total	172	100

### Profile of Businesses in Relation to Immigrant Employment

This section reports on all 246 businesses, not only those 173 that do employ immigrants. Businesses fell into three broad categories. Table 3 shows that of the 205 that responded to this question, at 40.5 per cent the largest number were service industries (including retail, wholesale, trade, transport, security, cleaning, health and hospitality industries), followed by the manufacturing/production sector at 37.5 per cent (including engineering, manufacturing, printing, construction and primary industries), with the remaining 22 per cent made up of professional services (including consultancies, information technology, finance and property).

**Table 3: Category of business**

	No.	%
Service industries	83	40.5
Manufacturing/production	77	37.5
Professional	45	22
Total	205	100

When the category of business was collated with whether or not immigrants were employed, 76.6 per cent of manufacturing/production, 69 per cent of the professional services sector and 62.2 per cent of service industries employed immigrants. These differences were not statistically significant.

The size of businesses according to number of employees (using the classification of Cameron and Massey, 1999) was related to the practices of employing immigrants. Of the 244 that completed this question, just under half of companies, 46.3 per cent, were large businesses with 100 or more employees (12.3 per cent were very large businesses with over 500 employees); 8.6 per cent were medium sized businesses with 50-99 employees; 30.3 per cent were small businesses with 6-49 employees; and the remaining 14.8 per cent were micro businesses, with five or fewer employees. This profile, shown in Table 4, was skewed by the use of "Top 500" businesses and does not reflect that of New Zealand businesses, where at that time, 99 per cent of businesses were small or micro sized (Business Activity Statistics, 1997).

**Table 4: Size of businesses and employment of immigrants**

	All respondents (No.)	All respondents (%)	Employing immigrants (No.)	Employing immigrants (%)
Micro: <5 employees	36	14.8	7	19.4
Small: 6-49	74	30.3	48	65
Medium: 50-99	21	8.6	17	81
Large: 100>	113	46.3	99	87.6
Total	244	100	171	-

As expected, the size of business and the practice of employing immigrants were positively related, with smallest businesses least likely to employ immigrants and large businesses most likely to employ immigrants: 87.6 per cent of large, 81 per cent of medium, 65 per cent of small, and only 19.4 per cent of micro businesses employed immigrants. All 13 companies with 1000 or more employees employed immigrants.

Asked whether business was “predominantly local”, “predominantly national” or “national and international”, about one third responded to each option: 30.9 per cent of businesses traded predominantly locally, 32.5 per cent predominantly nationally, and 35.8 per cent reported national and international business activities (0.8 per cent reported “other”). Of those businesses reporting international business activity (n=111), 53.2 per cent traded with up to five countries, and 46.8 per cent with more than five countries. Most frequently businesses traded, in declining order, with: Australia and the Pacific (45.6 per cent), Asia (24.3 per cent), North America (14.6 per cent), and the UK and Europe (13.6 per cent). Whether business activity was predominantly local, national or international was compared with practices of employing immigrants: 85.2 per cent of businesses describing their business activities as “national and international” employed immigrants compared with only 51.3 per cent of businesses trading locally only (see Table 5). These differences were significant (Chi square 10.46; 2 d.f.+p<.01), with the difference between local and national/international being responsible.



**Table 5: Relationship of scope of business activity and employment of immigrants**

<b>“Which of the following best describes the scope of your business activity?”</b>	<b>Employ immigrants (No.)</b>	<b>Employ immigrants (%)</b>	<b>Do not employ (No.)</b>	<b>Do not employ (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
Predominantly local	39	51.3	37	48.7	76
Predominantly national	57	71.3	23	28.8	80
National and international	75	85.2	13	14.8	88
Other	2	100	-		2
<b>Total</b>	<b>173</b>		<b>73</b>		

*Characteristics of CEO (or General Manager)*

Employment of immigrants was considered to be possibly related to whether CEOs were themselves immigrants, had overseas experience or other characteristics which predisposed them to employing immigrants. There appeared to be no relationship: CEOs were predominantly European/Pakeha males born in New Zealand. However, nearly two-thirds of the total (62.2 per cent) of these predominantly New Zealand-born CEOs said that they had had overseas work experience, while 30.9 per cent had not (4.5 per cent did not respond). There were 69.9 per cent who identified themselves as New Zealander/European/Pakeha ethnicity, 1.2 per cent as Maori, 4 per cent as Asian and “others” made up 0.8 per cent (24 per cent did not respond). Ethnicity broadly reflected country of birth, with 70.3 per cent born in New Zealand. Countries of birth for CEOs other than New Zealand-born, in descending frequency were: UK and Australia (equal), Asian countries, North America, Europe, South Africa, and the Pacific Islands (2 per cent did not respond). Most (90.7 per cent) identified themselves as male (2 per cent did not respond). The largest age band was 40-49 years at 41.1 per cent, 37.4 per cent were 50 years and over, and 19.9 per cent 39 years and under (1.6 per cent did not respond).

## The Immigrant Workforce

The following section reports only on those businesses that did employ immigrants and describes the profile of the immigrant workforce and the extent to which New Zealand businesses utilise the skills, training and qualifications of immigrants. Immigrant workers' social interactions with co-workers and participation in organisational activities are also discussed. In many businesses, it appeared that the respondent did not know or did not have access to some information about employees, and a number of questions were not answered (the number of respondents where less than the 173 that employed immigrants is indicated in these cases).

### *Profile of immigrant employees*

Employers were asked to estimate the predominant countries/regions of origin of their immigrant employees. Of the 103 who answered this question, in order of frequency these were: Pacific Islands (44.7 per cent), South East Asia and Europe (13.6 per cent each), South Asia (9.7 per cent), Africa of European descent (5.8 per cent), East Asia (3.9 per cent) and 1-3 per cent each for North America, Africa (not of European descent), Latin America, and Middle East. (Some respondents noted that information of this kind was not recorded.)

More male than female immigrants were employed, with over half of businesses reporting they employed mainly males, a third employing equal numbers of males and females, and few employing mainly females (see Table 6).

**Table 6: "Please indicate which of the following best describes your immigrant workforce"**

	No.	%
Male and female about equal	56	32.4
Mainly male	86	49.7
Mainly female	28	16.2
Don't know	3	1.7
Total	173	100

Employers indicated the skill categories of their immigrant employees (see Table 7). When the more highly skilled (managerial, professional and skilled trade) categories are combined, together 47.6 per cent of businesses employ immigrants in these

categories, with very few employed in managerial positions. This finding demonstrates that businesses are employing immigrants in more professional and skilled positions than is reflected in the literature. Having said that, however, in 52.4 per cent of businesses, most immigrants were employed in lower level and less skilled positions.

**Table 7: Skill categories in which “immigrant employees are currently employed”**

	No.	%
Managerial	3	2.3
Professional	36	28.1
Skilled trade	22	17.2
<i>Subtotal-Skilled</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>47.6</i>
Clerical/secretarial	11	8.6
Semi-skilled	33	25.8
Unskilled	23	18
<i>Subtotal-Less Skilled</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>52.4</i>
Total	128	100

There were differences between country of origin and skill category. Pacific peoples in respondent businesses tended to be employed predominantly (but not exclusively) in clerical, semiskilled and unskilled positions (67 per cent). The reverse pattern was found regarding immigrants from North America and Europe, of whom 65.2 and 57.4 per cent respectively were reported to be employed in professional, managerial and skilled positions. Regarding all other countries/regions of origin of immigrants, employees were evenly distributed across the combined categories of managerial/professional/skilled trade, and clerical/semi-skilled and unskilled.

There were also differences across categories of business and skill level of immigrant employees: not surprisingly, more professional businesses (61.9 per cent) employed immigrants in higher skill levels more than at lower skills, while only 45.8 per cent of businesses involved in manufacturing/production and 43.2 per cent of service businesses did so.

The size of business was related to the skill category of immigrant employees (see Table 8). Large businesses employed roughly equal proportions of immigrants in managerial/professional and skilled trade categories combined, and in clerical and

semiskilled/unskilled categories combined, while in medium sized and small businesses a higher proportion were employed in the lower skills categories.

**Table 8: Relationship of size of business and skill category of employee**

<b>Size of business</b>	<b>Highly skilled (No.)</b>	<b>Highly skilled (%)</b>	<b>Lower skilled (No.)</b>	<b>Lower skilled (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
Micro	3	75	1	25	4
Small	14	41.2	20	58.8	34
Medium	3	30	7	70	10
Large	40	51.3	38	48.7	78

Highly skilled: Managerial, professional, skilled trade

Lower skilled: Clerical, semiskilled, unskilled.

Employers were asked to indicate the types of employment contract that applied to their immigrant employees; they could tick as many response categories as applied. Immigrants were predominantly appointed to full-time permanent (in 63 per cent of businesses) and to full-time fixed term (in 12 per cent of businesses) contracts, a total of 75 per cent thus providing full-time and relatively secure employment to immigrant employees. In a further 14.6 per cent of businesses, they were employed part-time (12 per cent permanent and 2.6 per cent fixed-term), while in 10.3 per cent of businesses, immigrants were employed on an “other” contract type including on-call (6 per cent), piece-work basis (0.9 per cent) and unspecified (3.4 per cent).

When the gender of immigrant employees was cross-tabulated with skill category, in businesses employing “mainly males”, immigrants tended to be employed in highly skilled categories and in those employing “mainly females” immigrants were employed in lower skill categories, as shown in Table 9. Whereas in 56.7 per cent of businesses “mainly male” immigrant employees were employed in managerial, professional and skilled trade positions, in only 22.2 per cent with “mainly female” immigrant employees were they employed in these categories. Also gender of immigrant employees was related to employment contract type: in 83 per cent of businesses employing “mainly males”, immigrants were employed full-time while this was the case in only 52.5 per cent of businesses employing “mainly females”. In businesses employing “mainly females” and “mainly males” respectively, immigrants were employed part-time in 32.5 and 8 per cent of businesses, and in 15 percent and 8.9 per cent they were employed on-call, piecework or other employment conditions.

**Table 9: Gender of immigrant employee related to skill level and contract type**

		Male and female equal	Mainly male (No.)	Mainly male (%)	Mainly female- (No.)	Mainly female (%)	Total
<b>Skill</b>	Highly skilled	21	34	56.7	4	22.2	59
	Lower skilled	26	26	43.3	14	77.8	66
<b>Skill Totals</b>		<b>47</b>	<b>60</b>		<b>18</b>		<b>125</b>
<b>Contract Type</b>	Full- time	61	93	83	21	52.5	175
	Part- time	12	9	8	13	32.5	34
	Other	8	10	8.9	6	15	24
<b>Contract Type Totals</b>		<b>81</b>	<b>112</b>		<b>40</b>		<b>233</b>

By cross-tabulating skill level and employment contract type, managerial and professional categories were most likely to be employed full-time (100 per cent and 89 per cent respectively), followed by clerical (77 per cent), and between 65-67 per cent of the remaining categories employed full-time.

Employers were asked whether immigrant employees were using their pre-migration skills and qualifications in their workplace. In two-thirds of businesses, immigrant employees were reported as using their pre-migration qualifications and skills in current employment (see Table 10). At the same time, nearly half of the businesses reported that their immigrant employees were furthering their occupational training and qualifications in New Zealand, but one-third were not, as shown in Table 10.

**Table 10: Use and advancement of qualifications by immigrant employees**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Use pre-migration qualifications</b>	113	65.3	33	19.1	27	15.6	173
<b>Advancing qualifications in New Zealand</b>	87	49.7	56	32	32	18.3	175

Employers offered examples of immigrants not using prior qualifications: overseas graduates serving in shops, surgeons working as process workers, architects washing dishes, qualified nurses working as unqualified caregivers, computer programmers working in clerical and storeman positions, and so on.

By cross-tabulating the advancement of qualifications in New Zealand with skill category, immigrant employees in all skill categories except clerical were reported to be furthering their qualifications, particularly those in professional, managerial and skilled trade categories shown on Table 11. The fields most frequently specified in which already qualified immigrants were furthering their education in New Zealand were engineering, accountancy and business management. Those in semi-skilled and unskilled areas were also reportedly furthering their qualifications. For example, those from places that lacked certain industries, such as the Pacific Islands, who were unable to acquire skills and qualifications pre-migration, were most likely to undertake further qualifications. This group received much of their training on the job, and some were working toward a trade certificate. Process work and construction-related jobs were given as examples.

**Table 11: Advancement of qualifications by skill category**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Managerial</b>	1 (33%)	2
<b>Professional</b>	23 (76.7%)	7
<b>Skilled trade</b>	11 (68.7%)	5
<b>Clerical</b>	2 (20%)	8
<b>Semiskilled</b>	13 (54.2%)	11
<b>Unskilled</b>	11 (61.1%)	7
<b>Total</b>	61 (60.4%)	40

Employers in the present survey were asked whether the English language ability of their immigrants was adequate for the job they did. Table 12 shows that over 89 per cent agreed that English was adequate, while only 10.3 per cent responded that English was inadequate. Employers also indicated that for a proportion of immigrant employees, English was either the first language or they were fluent English speakers. We can conclude, therefore, that employers regard the level of English of the majority of immigrant workers as adequate for the job they did, including the majority of those who are neither native nor fluent speakers of English.

At the same time, about one-third of respondents estimated that their immigrant employees were seeking to improve their English language skills through tuition, while a third said they were not, and the remaining third of respondents did not know or said tuition was not necessary (see Table 12). English tuition appeared to be mainly at the initiative and expense of the employee: only 8 per cent of businesses supported English language tuition, while 68 per cent did not (20 per cent of employers did not respond to the question or did not know).

**Table 12: English language adequacy for the job and improvement of English through tuition**

	Yes	%	No	%	Don't know	%	Total
<b>English Adequate for the job</b>	156	89.1	18	10.3	1	0.6	175
<b>Improving English through tuition</b>	55	33.7	57	35	51	31.3	163

When the employers' assessment of adequacy of English for the job was cross-tabulated with skill level, a slightly higher proportion (54.5 per cent) noted that the English was not adequate with respect to higher skills levels than was the case for lower skill levels, while a lower proportion (47.6 per cent) said English of those with higher skill levels was adequate.

Difficulties in staff relationships because of English language ability appeared not to be a widespread problem: only 22.3 per cent of employers felt that the English language limitations of immigrant workers posed difficulties in staff relationships.

No difficulties were reported by 60 per cent of employers, and 17.7 per cent did not know or it was not applicable. Middle Eastern and African immigrants (not of European descent) were identified as most likely to be limited by English language difficulties in mixing with co-workers.

The finding that English language limitations generally do not create problems in the workplace and affect social relations among all employees is further strengthened by employers' observations regarding social mixing: the majority (89.7 per cent) reported that their immigrant employees mixed sometimes or fully with other staff, and a similar proportion reported that their 'Kiwi' employees mixed sometimes or fully with immigrant co-workers; these findings are displayed on Table 13.

**Table 13: Extent to which employees attempt to mix socially**

**[a] Immigrant employees mixing with all other staff**

	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Sometimes/fully mixed</b>	157	89.7
<b>Seldom/never mixed</b>	14	8
<b>Don't know</b>	4	2.3
<b>Total</b>	175	100

**[b] 'Kiwi' employees mixing with immigrant employees**

	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Sometimes/fully mixed</b>	154	88.5
<b>Seldom/never mixed</b>	14	8
<b>Don't know</b>	6	3.5
<b>Total</b>	174	100

Participation of immigrant employees in staff meetings or the equivalent was high, with two-thirds reported as participating to a high or moderate level, as shown in Table 14. Immigrants from the Middle East exhibited the lowest levels of participation, and North Americans the highest.



**Table 14: Level of immigrant employee participation in staff meetings or equivalent**

	No.	%
<b>Moderate/high levels</b>	114	65.5
<b>Low levels/not at all</b>	44	25.3
<b>Don't know</b>	16	9.2
<b>Total</b>	174	100

A different pattern was reported regarding involvement in organised labour movements such as trade unions: in only 21.4 per cent of businesses were immigrant employees involved, while in 68.8 per cent, immigrant employees were not involved, and 9.8 per cent of employers did not know. This finding needs to be treated cautiously as the survey did not establish the degree to which participating businesses were unionised.

The literature concerning English language does not focus on the degree to which English language is adequate, or on the proportion of immigrant employees whose grasp of English is adequate, but on the problems that unfamiliarity with English can pose for an employer. Indeed, a number of respondents emphasised the importance of English fluency for safety reasons and to be able to understand instructions. The burden, if any, on the employer was probed in the following question:

*“What steps do you take to ensure that immigrants whose first language is not English are familiar with employment contract conditions (including grievance procedures, access to workers’ collectives, occupational safety and health regulations, company policies, machine operations, job procedures, etc)?”*

Results indicate that employment of immigrants where English is not the first language does not impose particular burdens on employers, and/or that employers do not make special provision for this population.

The following steps taken are probably no different from those for any employee:

<i>Explained personally by CEO or HR Manager (n=76)</i>	81.6%
<i>Written English language material provided (n=83)</i>	94%
<i>Explained in presence of union representative or equivalent (n=55)</i>	25.4%

These steps may differ from normal but are at no additional financial cost to the employer:

<i>Explained through co-worker of same language background (n=73)</i>	71.2%
<i>Explained through employee-nominated support person (n=57)</i>	43.9%

Steps taken that carry a cost to the employer were found to be seldom used:

<i>Explained with an interpreter external to the company (n=52)</i>	17.3%
<i>Written material provided in immigrant's own language (n=52)</i>	19.2%

To conclude the results on language and social cohesion in the workplace, some participants made additional comments on the survey forms. The additional comments indicated that although English language difficulties are widely held to pose problems for businesses and immigrants alike, in fact businesses that employ immigrants report experiencing few problems in this area, and “what problems do arise are easily overcome”, in the words of one employer. English language limitations did not interfere to any marked extent with either the employees’ ability to perform the job or with their participation with other employees in the workplace.

Some employers noted that although English fluency was a prerequisite at the recruitment stage, recruitment processes may not ensure that the employee’s English is indeed adequate for the job. Other employers pointed out that the occurrence of English limitations may be to the detriment of the business: additional time and effort is needed to ensure instructions are understood; communication difficulties can create interpersonal problems among staff; and limitations restrict the full utilisation of an immigrant’s skills. English that was inadequate for the job among professional employees was reported to be more problematic for businesses. However, English language limitations in highly skilled and professional employees can also be overcome. It was observed, therefore, that it is important that immigrant status *per se* not constitute a barrier in the recruitment process, preventing immigrants from reaching the interview stage: once employed, English tends to improve rapidly, and the efforts both employer and immigrant worker put into overcoming difficulties reap benefits of loyalty and high productivity. These additional comments along with the results of the follow-up interviews are reported in full later in the report.

## Perceptions of Immigrants as Employees

Employers of immigrants were asked to comment, on the basis of their experience, on the work ethic of immigrant employees. The study also sought to discover whether the perceptions of immigrants held by employers based on the experience of including immigrants in the workforce differed from perceptions of those employers who did not employ immigrants. Employers in the present survey who *do not* currently employ immigrants were requested to rate 14 statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale: 106 such employers did so. Responses are reported below in the appropriate sections. Noting that the number exceeds the 73 who said they did not employ immigrants, about one-third of the rating of statements therefore are those of respondents who did employ immigrants.

In relation to the perceptions of employers of immigrants: almost half saw immigrants as no different from Kiwi employees. Nearly a third indicated that immigrant employees were inclined to work harder/more diligently, while a negligible number indicated that their immigrant employees were inclined to work less diligently (see Table 15). A few respondents suggested that an initial high level of diligence, high enough to “make some ‘Kiwis’ look lazy”, can decline to the “company norm” over time. Respondents who rated immigrants’ work ethic as high went on to explain that many immigrants have had difficulty in securing the job in the first place, and are determined to prove themselves; they are thankful for the job, work hard to please and “do not complain”.

**Table 15: Employers’ assessment of immigrant employees’ work ethic**

<b>“Immigrant employees....”</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Are inclined to work harder/more diligently	50	28.7
About the same	84	48.3
Less hard/be less diligent	2	1.1
Depends on the immigrant group	25	14.4
Don’t know/no opinion	13	7.5
Total	174	100

In contrast’ respondents who did not employ immigrants were more likely to perceive immigrants as hard working. Asked to rate their agreement with the statement “*Immigrant workers are very hardworking*”, nearly two-thirds (62.3 per cent) neither agreed nor disagreed, while 35.8 per cent agreed or strongly agreed.

Many employers of immigrants commented that it was neither possible nor fair to generalise as work ethic was an individual, not a cultural, matter. Some pointed out that as performance appraisal and human resource management practices did not record ethnic origin, they had no data to draw from; others noted that performance measurement demonstrated that the work ethic of immigrant and “Kiwi” employees was similar. In support of this view, when ratings of work ethic of immigrant employees were related to ethnicity or country of origin, no differences emerged, with a majority of immigrants of any origin regarded as working more diligently or similar to ‘Kiwi’ counterparts. A few respondents suggested that an initial high level of diligence, high enough to “make some Kiwis look lazy”, can decline to the “company norm” over time. The absence of clear differences of work ethic as seen by employers also suggests a lack of stereotyping of immigrants collectively by employers. The proportion of a workforce made up by immigrants made no difference to the perceived work ethic of immigrant employees.

Employers of immigrants commented widely on the benefits accrued to a business by employing immigrants. A fundamental benefit of immigrant labour reflected the need for skills: many companies commented on the overall small labour market in New Zealand, and in specified areas (eg information technology), shortages can be acute; there are limited opportunities in New Zealand for breadth of experience in given areas; and there is a need to accommodate temporary and seasonal shortages of labour (e.g. in the meat processing industry, and in crop harvesting). In some cases, immigrants were reported as willing to do some jobs unattractive to New Zealanders (e.g. menial work).

In addition, immigrant employees were widely regarded as a source of innovation, new ideas, and world-class knowledge (e.g. as a way of keeping the company leading in technology and able to offer highest quality services). Immigrant employees were also positively regarded as a means of enabling the company to service an increasingly multicultural customer base, both in New Zealand and overseas, and to develop its multicultural workplace. Employing people from diverse communities was identified as a means of ensuring that the workplace reflected the community served. For example, multinational company representatives reported on regular exchange or secondment programmes, whereby overseas employees work in the New Zealand-based company for a period of time. These experiences were reported as positive and enriching for both the company and seconded employees, and both reflected and strengthened the globalisation of corporations. Respondents who did not employ immigrants appeared not to recognise potential benefits. In response to the statement *“Immigrants contribute to the company’s strategic objectives because of their different backgrounds”*, only 20 per cent agreed/strongly agreed; 14.3 per cent disagreed and the remaining 65.7 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.

A large number of employers described their immigrant workers in favourable terms: very loyal, stable, good for the company, reliable, focused on the job, consistently meeting objectives and deadlines, with their contributions to the business far outweighing any problems. However, respondents who did not employ immigrants did not rate reliability highly. In response to the statement *"Immigrant workers are very reliable"*, only 23.6 per cent agreed, while 70.7 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Employing immigrants was seen as *"making life interesting"*, broadening the mind and understanding of New Zealanders. Similarly, when asked to rate the statement *"Immigrants enrich organisational culture,"* respondents who did not employ immigrants tended to agree: 53.8 per cent agreed/strongly agreed, and only 7.5 per cent disagreed; the remainder had a neutral position. Many employers of immigrants went on to describe the *"added value"* of immigrant employees: they pointed out that immigrants bring a wider expertise and experience from overseas; different perspectives on work, work processes and work ethics; demonstrate a flexibility and willingness to change; and are knowledgeable about other cultures and languages. Asked to rate the statement *"Immigrants are an asset to a company"*, 58.9 per cent of respondents not employing immigrants neither agreed nor disagreed and only a third (36.4 per cent) agreed. Similarly 58.5 per cent were neutral on the statement *"Immigrants bring a useful dimension to decision-making"*, while a quarter (26.4 per cent) agreed.

In their responses to the following two statements, respondents not employing immigrants appeared to be more concerned about potential problems than advantages. To the statement *"Employing immigrants can create problems for a company,"* more than half, 53.8 per cent agreed/strongly agreed, while 16 per cent disagreed and the remaining 30.2 per cent were neutral. Close to half, 44.3 per cent, agreed/strongly agreed that *"The different beliefs and customs of immigrants can be difficult to accommodate"*; 17 per cent disagreed and 38.7 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed. Further, 83 per cent of respondents not employing immigrants agreed/strongly agreed that *"Potential communication difficulties can discourage a company from employing immigrants"*; only 5.7 per cent disagreed, while 11.3 per cent were neutral.

The mainly positive comments of respondents who did employ immigrants were offset by some negative experiences, such as disappointment at a few immigrants working illegally (without work permits). Immigrants persistently and sometimes aggressively marketing their own skills in the search for a job was a practice described by several, who had mixed views on the practice. The difficulty for employers is they may not have vacant positions to offer. Other difficulties enumerated included: unrealistic expectations of some regarding remuneration and the nature of the job; transience, where immigrants used first jobs as stepping stones

to better positions; unplanned and sometimes protracted periods of leave to attend to family issues in the home country; and the particular issues surrounding differing social values and leadership styles of immigrants appointed to senior positions. It may be argued that none of these difficulties are unique to immigrant employees, however.

A manager of British origin urged New Zealand companies to “give [immigrants] a go”, adding that paradoxically, New Zealand businesses do not want to invest in “training people up and then losing them”. He added, so long as there is a limited pool of skills, the employment of immigrants will continue to be necessary. Employers who perceived New Zealand businesses to be generally discriminatory suggested that such prejudice was rationalised as a concern about relationships with clients, and a misplaced emphasis on English language and company culture. As the findings of the present survey indicate, these difficulties are seldom as intractable in experience as feared.

## **Practices and Policies Regarding the Employment of Immigrants**

The final section of survey results reports both on businesses that do and do not employ immigrants. It begins by examining recruitment practices and then company policies and practices that might support immigrant employees.

### *Practices and policies regarding recruitment*

Employers of immigrants (n= 175) were asked to indicate the influences of New Zealand work experience and New Zealand qualifications when appointing immigrants applicants. The influence of New Zealand work experience had a “very strong” or “strong” influence for a third of employers, and New Zealand qualifications influenced 27.4 per cent of employers. These results are displayed on Table 16.

**Table 16: Influence of New Zealand work experience and qualifications when employing an immigrant applicant**

**[a] Influence of New Zealand work experience**

	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Strong/very strong influence</b>	59	33.7
<b>Some influence</b>	68	38.9
<b>Little/very little influence</b>	39	22.3
<b>No influence</b>	9	5.1
<b>Total</b>	175	100

**[b] Influence of New Zealand qualifications**

	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Strong/very strong influence</b>	48	27.4
<b>Some influence</b>	69	39.4
<b>Little/very little influence</b>	48	27.4
<b>No influence</b>	10	5.7
<b>Total</b>	175	99.9

Employers are clearly influenced by prior New Zealand work experience and the possession of New Zealand qualifications when appointing immigrants. When level of influence of prior New Zealand experience and New Zealand qualifications were related to category of employment, the influence of New Zealand work experience and New Zealand qualifications were slightly stronger when seeking to appoint immigrants to professional/ managerial and to skilled trade positions, but still had some influence when appointing immigrants to clerical, semi-skilled and unskilled positions.

Of respondents not employing immigrants who rated the statement, *“Lack of relevant work experience discourages me from employing immigrants”*, 40 per cent agreed/strongly agreed, while 25.7 per cent did not agree; the remaining third (34.3 per cent) were neutral. Similar views across the two groups of employers regarding the influence of prior New Zealand experience, therefore, were apparent. At the same time, respondents not employing immigrants indicated an openness to employing

immigrants. Responding to the statement, *"This company would willingly employ immigrants"* 56.2 per cent agreed/strongly agreed, and only 4.8 per cent disagreed; 39 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed. And in response to the statement, *"It makes no difference to this company whether a suitably qualified applicant is 'Kiwi' or immigrant"*, a high 70.5 per cent agreed/strongly agreed, 6.6 per cent disagreed and 22.9 per cent were neutral.

Asked whether they employed immigrants because they had language skills in addition to English, only 15.4 percent of employers indicated they do so, while 82.2 per cent did not, and 2.3 per cent did not know or language skills were not relevant. It was mainly companies in the hotel/hospitality industry, in professional services and finance/property that tended to employ immigrants because of language skills other than English. Two companies operating call centres utilised language skills of immigrant employees to service a diverse customer base. Companies trading internationally were no more likely than local and national businesses to employ immigrants because of language skills other than English, although some respondents whose companies had international business links commented on the added value of management and technical employees who spoke languages of trading partners.

Employers of immigrants were also asked about practices in recruiting immigrants who are related. The practice appears uncommon: not at all for 54.3 per cent and not normally for a further 28 per cent; only 14.3 per cent said they often or always did so, and a small number did not know. The practice appeared to be perceived as more common among respondents not employing immigrants: 22.9 per cent agreed with the statement *"Immigrant workers recruit other potential employees"*; 5.7 per cent disagreed, but the majority, 71.4 per cent, neither agreed nor disagreed. Such practices were slightly more likely when recruiting to on-call or piece-work employment than other contract types. When category of employee was related to such recruitment practices, using networks of existing employees was frequently carried out only for semiskilled and unskilled categories of employee, while such methods of recruitment were seldom or never used to recruit managerial/professional and skilled trade employees.

Continuing on the theme of recruitment, all respondents were asked whether their company sought to address the shortage of workers by recruiting immigrants: three quarters (75.1 per cent) did not do so, while 24.9 per cent (n=60) did so. Respondents were also asked whether their company had an explicit policy on recruiting immigrants: 95.9 per cent (n= 236) had no policy, and only 3.7 per cent did have a policy. Asked if the company assisted prospective immigrants by offering jobs, 16.7 per cent (n=35) did so while 83.3 per cent did not. Similarly, 17.8 per cent (n=40) of respondents had appointed immigrants to their positions before they arrived in New



Zealand while 82.2 per cent had not. These rates are overall very low in the light of potential immigrants applying under the General Skills category where a job offer is a means to acquire the requisite points. Generally, overseas persons were appointed because persons with the right skill or expertise are not available locally; specialised design engineering, information technology, and wine making were three areas specified where a firm job offer assisted people to immigrate. However, such job offers were not made without a previously identified need for the appointment. Moreover, some employers complained of difficulties encountered in arranging work permits and residency for desirable immigrant employees, pointing out an apparent lack of alignment between immigration policy and practices and the needs of industry.

#### *Practices and policies regarding the support of immigrant employees in the workplace*

While very few businesses had policies on the recruitment of immigrants, it seems that equally few had any explicit policies relating to immigrants once they were employed. Respondents not employing immigrants rated the statement, *“It is a company’s responsibility to make the most of benefits the immigrant offers”* : 70.5 per cent agreed/strongly agreed, 6.7 per cent disagreed, while the remaining 22.8 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed. This last section now considers ways in which businesses carry out that responsibility.

Asked if the company had an explicit anti-discriminatory policy, only 29.9 per cent did so; 70.1 per cent had no such policy. The policies in place in New Zealand businesses surveyed which dealt with issues surrounding discrimination were reported to apply to all employees, not only immigrants. Even then, less than 30 per cent of companies reported that they had such policies in place. Employers emphasised that human rights legislation prohibited discrimination on ethnic or any other characteristic, and that employees were appointed on grounds of their fitness for the job alone. No employer admitted to positive discrimination in favour of immigrants. The point was made that racial slurs among employees occasionally occurred, and such behaviour constituted serious misconduct.

Respondents then responded to a series of questions on practices or policies, shown on Table 17. It is evident that very few companies have instituted explicit policies and practices that together would support immigrant employees to contribute to the workplace and the employing company. This is in spite of the fact that 70.3 per cent of the participating businesses did employ immigrants.

**Table 17: Responses to question on explicit policies and practices**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not applicable/ no response</b>
<b>Mentoring immigrant employees</b>	18 (7.3%)	178 (72.4%)	50 (20.3%)
<b>Training immigrant employees</b>	35 (14.2%)	164 (66.7%)	47 (19.1%)
<b>Coaching/training supervisors to work with immigrant employees</b>	19 (7.7%)	181 (73.6%)	46 (18.7%)
<b>Translating training manuals and company policy into languages of immigrant employees</b>	9 (3.7%)	185 (75.2%)	52 (21.1%)
<b>Supporting English language tuition</b>	29 (11.8%)	167 (67.9%)	50 (20.3%)

Employers who reported such policies and practices in their businesses pointed out that mentoring, training and other policies related to all employees, not only immigrants. Generally, provision was based on personal need (including supporting language learning), not on the basis of immigrant status. Noting that few businesses translated training manuals and policy documents into other languages, employers used a range of measures to ensure understanding including personal explanations by the CEO or HR managers; sometimes with the assistance of a co-worker or other a person who speaks the same language as the immigrant and rarely with the assistance of an external interpreter. Some employers said they had in place one or more of the above mechanisms, others none, and still others did not respond to this question. In view of the high level of English adequacy perceived to be held by immigrant employees, these measures appear reasonable to ensure that business employment and other policies are understood. Employers in the present survey commented that many New Zealand businesses have neither the ability nor capacity to support potential immigrant employees. For example: businesses are not in a strong position to assess overseas qualifications and work experience; English language support is seldom the “core business” of companies; and there is seldom the spare capacity to assist in immigration applications and general support of immigrant families.

These findings, that few businesses have policies in place either for recruiting immigrants to the workforce or for supporting immigrants once employed, were at first surprising considering that the objectives of current immigration policy encourages immigration of highly educated young people from any country, and supports cultural enrichment of society. Indeed, in spite of employers’ generally

favourable attitudes and positive experiences in employing immigrants, such policies and practices as are in place tend toward integration and assimilation into the workplace culture, rather than fostering diversity.

# EMPLOYERS' EXPERIENCES IN THE EMPLOYMENT OF IMMIGRANTS

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In the context of a tight labour market and skills shortage, it is argued that increasingly New Zealand will need to rely on importing skills through immigration (e.g. Hudson, 2006). This section raises challenges that both employers and immigrant employees face and how both parties have worked through the challenges to the benefit of all. The data reported in this section was provided by those survey participants who wished to participate in an unstructured follow-up face to face interview, nineteen in all, to further discuss issues important to the respondent related to immigrant employees, along with some qualitative comments all survey participants could add onto the questionnaire.

Respondents' own words are used to avoid the risk of misconstruing them through paraphrasing their comments. Where relevant, reference is made to results of the questionnaire survey to comment on agreement between qualitative comments and survey responses. The interview results are reported in three main sections: perceptions and benefits of immigrant skills, barriers to immigrant employment, and a discussion on how job seekers and companies can improve immigrant employment.

To introduce the section, oft-repeated problems and perceptions, positive and negative, that lead to some employers being risk averse in relation to employing immigrants are discussed, along with issues facing employers at the recruiting stage. Issues that were identified as particular challenges are then discussed, such as language and communication, and cultural issues. The focus of the end of the section is not on the problems themselves, but measures employers and also immigrant employees took to turn problems into advantages.

## Use of Immigrant Skills and Benefits to the Company

First it is important to note that many of those participating in interviews had extensive experience with immigrant employees. These comments were not made by employers with little or no experience, or who were prejudiced against employing immigrants:

There is a large community within the organisation, for want of a better word expatriates mostly. They come here to do their work, their work takes years and years to do so they're very committed. So we have ...

Chinese, Americans, Australians, lots of Europeans, we have Russians, we have the whole, I suppose you say continuum of countries from around the world....Our foreign staff would be about 80% and we have about 250 staff. (Science institute)

We have Pacific Islanders at process level, we have in various professional levels people from various parts of the world, from Iraq, South Africa, Britain, Australia so we do have a multi cultural work force. (Processing industry)

We're really keen [to employ immigrants], we've got a broad range of people here from other countries, Poland, Taiwan, Czechoslovakia, Hong Kong and the Philippines and the Tongan group. (Rest home)

### *Dependence on immigrants for skills*

Some respondents reported the dependence, in some cases a growing dependence, on immigrants for labour and skills. Many respondents described employing immigrants when they were the best applicant for the position. One respondent in a specialised company "just couldn't find the people with the right sort of fit". Others were simply unable to recruit sufficient skills locally, particularly in the case of highly specialised skills, and welcomed applications from immigrants with the required skills:

Well our issue is a bit different. People who come to us have generally got some very good qualities and high skills and it takes years to build up those skills in the pharmaceutical area particularly in inventory control, product knowledge ...there's a dire shortage of qualified pharmacists in New Zealand. (Interview 5)

Immigrants with skills that were not as difficult to recruit locally could be targeted for other reasons, such as knowledge and contacts in an overseas site:

Right now we're actually looking for some people in New Zealand to work [in an overseas area], we need a specific set of skills ...we're recruiting within New Zealand and we're actually looking at taking some immigrants on just to see. ( Interview 10)

While for the above, applicants were frequently immigrants looking for work, other organisations needed to recruit off-shore, supporting the immigration of skilled people:

Not only do we get applicants from overseas but we actually seek them. If we have a vacancy we can't just advertise and expect to get applications from people who are qualified, very highly qualified ... So half of our staff are trained here, we recruit them as graduates and make them into trainees, and from time to time we recruit from overseas ... in the past 6 years anyway we do it every second year. (Interview 6)

At the other end of the spectrum were companies that were finding it difficult to recruit unskilled labour. One respondent spoke of dependence on immigrant labour that local labour was unwilling to do:

I can't always get staff. I can't always get unskilled staff at all, I'm recruiting [immigrants] almost constantly. (Interview 13)

#### *Added benefits of immigrant employees*

A number of respondents when comparing local and immigrant employees commented on the equivalence of technical skills, for example, "we have no problem with their skills, we get some great people from overseas." With immigrants' technical skills not inferior to those of New Zealand educated people, immigrants could also bring added benefits to the employing organisation, benefits that included knowledge about a region and culture, languages other than English, contacts and networks, procedures and standards, and a global strategic perspective that contrasts with a provincial and operational point of view.

There are projects going on all over the world that ... we can use, or top up our knowledge base. They bring their network with them. They bring their chain of knowledge and a lot of the knowledge is traded for nothing. (Interview 9)

[It's] an understanding of the history of where they come from and surrounding country[ies] as well. So it's knowing the culture. (Interview 12)

Where we've got 40 people they might come from an [overseas] software house with 2000. So they quite often have been exposed to quite good

procedures, have good standards, they can bring that to us, that's quite good, different work ethics. (Interview 17).

Frequently, language and cultural differences were seen as problematic (see below). However, there were also respondents who regarded these differences as assets to be tapped into:

I just call that bringing your cultural diversity into the organisation...especially if you're looking globally. ...so we need to be able tolerate people from different parts of the world, they bring different experience, ideas with them which can strengthen your foundation. (Interview 18)

We're looking across an Asian Pacific approach as part of doing that we are now starting to try, to understand ethnicity in our company as a resource. (Interview 8)

Well [Chinese language] valuable, it's absolutely valuable and we use him all the time. If there's the need for the Chinese language he speaks it. (Interview 6)

Other respondents were less focused on hard benefits; they simply appreciated that "it just makes it a richer place, really interesting":

Variety. It really makes it a special place. Because of the sharing of the cultures and I think, I suppose really the sharing of the cultures, but also the knowledge that we're really happy with these different races working for us, it really brings something special. (Interview 13)

Some respondents who completed the postal questionnaire added comments to the form on the value of employing immigrants:

Our workplace should reflect the community we serve.

Immigrants are great, good for our business, and broaden horizons of local staff ..... assist our staff in understanding the needs of overseas clients. Teach us there is life beyond New Zealand.

### *Positive Perceptions of Immigrant Employees*

Several respondents acknowledged that immigrants had often paid a high personal price in leaving their country and coming to an unfamiliar place. On top of the hardship of settling, many have difficulties in getting a job. This background, in the view of a number of employers, leads to immigrants being highly desirable employees. Characteristics such as perseverance, diligence, commitment, hard work, putting in long hours, high work ethic, dedication, putting the company first, and the like were mentioned. One respondent added “those people, if you find them, are worth keeping and really looking after”. A small selection of comments highlights employers’ positive experiences:

And in fact once they get to know our systems and they certainly bring along ideas, then we can benefit a great deal from them....They are just so eager and keen to learn and to contribute to the organisation....No problems, no disciplinary problems. They are just wonderful to employ. (Interview 2)

Commitment [is high]. If they’re immigrants, they’re looking to move from their country. [They have been] under pressure often, places like Iraq and India, a lot of the Asian countries, they bring with them a real commitment. (Interview 9).

Their attitude is generally brilliant, you know they are trying to make a new start, they all love New Zealand. (Interview 17)

Work ethic, in particular, was commented on positively, with several mentioning Asians in particular. These comments agreed with responses in the survey where 77 per cent responded that immigrant employees were inclined to work harder or more diligently, or at the same level, as Kiwi employees.

The fact that their work ethic, work till midnight and you’ve got to tell them to go home. I guess this is the same for the [named ethnicity] people, their work methods are very high, very impressive, always trying to impress ...very, very competent. (Interview 2)

An Asian will deliver the goods, they’ll probably do everything they’re told, they seldom complain. Where as if you ask a Kiwi too much they probably complain.... Also the Asian, he doesn’t expect too much of the manager. (Interview 12)



While positive perceptions and experiences were emphasised as demonstrated above, some respondents held contrary views. For a number of reasons, the immigrant employee may not be committed, exemplary or reliable. However, in the present study, these views were less prominent, and could reflect a single bad experience, a stereotyped view, or general concerns about moving into the unknown. For example, one employer stated that their experiences with highly qualified immigrants have not been good, and they will not appoint immigrants in the future. Questionnaire respondents added these comments:

They do tend to be a bit transient and tend to move onto other employers in a year or so.

We have had almost all of our immigrants (South African, Malaysian, Indian) return home due to family problems (bereavements etc) at what has not always been a convenient time for us.

Specific issues raised are discussed as barriers to employment of immigrants (see below). First, the matter of how well immigration policy serves employers is discussed insofar as these experiences appear to influence the way employers regard immigrants.

#### *The fit between immigration policy and employers' requirements*

Noting the dependence of some industries on immigrant skills and labour, an issue that a number of participants raised concerned what employers saw as a mis-match in immigration policy delivering the kind of skills and persons that employers need. Such perceptions based on a few experiences, it appeared, could lead on to employers being wary of immigrant applicants as a class and generalising their unhappiness with immigration policy to the immigrants themselves.

I do think the government goes the wrong way sometimes on letting people in, I think there should be more of these people allowed in, the points seem terribly harsh sometimes, you see others who have managed to get in with not much. (Interview 17)

We just haven't got positions for [skilled immigrants], and the sort of people that we want to bring into the company probably aren't the sort of people that are immigrating and looking for the jobs. (Interview 16)

Added to these difficulties, in the case of being unable to recruit local people and wanting to employ or retain an immigrant, a number of respondents commented on

difficulties they had regarding work visas and residency permits. Some lost desirable employees because the work visa had expired; others were unable to obtain the visa in the first place. With complaints of constant change in regulations, employers became unsure of what the immigration rules were. And employers found themselves in the difficult position of being approached to offer employment in order for the prospective immigrant employee to get residency. Difficulties generated by immigration policies and rules then reflected negatively on immigrant applicants through no fault of their own:

I'm not sure of immigration rules now, but it's much easier if you go to an employer and say I do have permanent residency, but only to say I need a job to get the permanent residency.... I think they've actually switched it round. (Interview 18)

A dimension of the issue of poor congruence between skills recruited through immigration policy and employers' needs was that New Zealand industry generally lacks the size and scope for employing highly skilled people, and does not have the degree of specialisation, so immigrants with highly specialised qualifications are difficult to place appropriately:

My theory on that, one is that the immigration people have done not a very good job, they've imported or allowed a lot of immigrants into this country and we don't have the infrastructure, particularly in the industry to absorb them. You know we get these guys, mechanical engineers and this and that, and they've got huge qualifications and probably excellent people, but we don't have the places to put them in, we really don't. I mean a couple who came in, they had no job, and she was crying quietly in the corner while he was saying how difficult it was to get a job. (Interview 1)

A perfect example is a job we were recruiting for yesterday for a laboratory technician, the 5 people of which 3 were immigrants from ...I think one was Korean, one was from Iraq, one was Chinese. One of them ... was working in a very lowly part-time lab assistance job and as a taxi driver as an evening job. The other one was a part time caretaker and the other one was studying. All of them had studied in New Zealand and none of them could get jobs in their professional areas. And I think part of the problem is the fact that New Zealand, the way that we sell New Zealand particularly the immigration stakes, through immigration consultants and through using the immigration service, is that this is an educated country, if you are well educated with the right experience then you can get a job. And my experience particularly in this area is that this is

not the case. And it is extremely upsetting to see these well qualified people come from overseas. (Interview 9)

To sum up this discussion, most participants in the follow-up interviews used immigrant skills, many were dependent on immigrants and valued the added benefits. Fewer were generally wary of immigrants, sometimes because of actual negative experiences, others because it could be difficult to place a specialised skill set, and generally because of a perception that immigration policy did not deliver the skills and people New Zealand employers required.

## **Barriers to Employing Immigrants**

In addition to a weak fit between immigrant skills and workplace needs, in the case of skilled immigrants said to be overqualified, there were two issues that participants frequently raised. These were English language and communication, and culture. Other concerns some employers had regarding employing immigrants reflected the greater difficulty in checking qualifications and work experience. However, participants held a range of views on all these issues.

### *English Language Skills*

The ability to communicate in English was repeatedly given as a reason why immigrants found it difficult to find employment. This was in spite of comments that the “technical” language was “more or less the same, I guess it doesn’t matter where you come from, you can learn it”.

The only stumbling block is language really. It’s the only thing that makes them different from everybody else. (Interview 17)

The key things are communication...language. If you can’t talk to people you’ve got a problem and it’s very, very important...for immigrants to actually have a level of English, spoken and written, to communicate. I don’t believe it’s possible to work in today’s society in a vacuum which in effect the language does. (Interview 15)

English is really I think the crux of it. If, it doesn’t matter what country they come from, if they can communicate in the English language, it’s not a problem, generally it tends not to be a problem. (Interview 18)

English was seen as important for those also in less skilled areas but absolutely essential in highly skilled positions. Furthermore, a local colloquial version of English was regarded as necessary:

I don't think there's any job anywhere where language skills are not important... They've got to be able to understand instruction and have a reasonable understanding of colloquial terms as well. (Interview 1)

I reckon that's probably the biggest stumbling block, if your English isn't good. [Deficient English in an unskilled job] is not a problem. If you took that to a managerial level that would obviously be a huge stumbling block. (Interview 19)

Employees with deficient English language skills were seen as a cost, or potential cost, to the company: more time was needed to give instructions, the risk of error was greater, and the contribution of the employee was possibly lower.

You have a technical role, which a lot of immigrants are in because they come with specific skills. But really it's quite a challenge if you're not up there with the English language. Just to keep pace with what's being said, never mind contributing from your technical expertise, it's very hard. You get left behind. (Interview 18)

[Employers expect] to give the person an instruction, a reasonable instruction, and walk away, they're not going to expect to have to spend time deciphering or making sure that the person [understands], they are going to assume that because the person's a paid professional, that he's going to understand a reasonable instruction. (Interview 1)

I would aim to employ people who could be immediately productive. If I couldn't get anybody that provided all the qualities then I have to start looking into other alternatives, but it may well be that I'm better to be without a person. (Interview 4)

However, not all participants held such firm views. Some said that their opinion might depend on the context. Others described how English language issues could be accommodated; for example, not putting them in roles with high customer contact or telephone answering requirements. An example was given of a highly skilled person "choosing" to work in an unskilled position because he "chose" not to learn English. Yet others balanced English issues such as accent with the asset to the company of languages in addition to English.

I can have somebody working in the workshop here with a very minor grasp of English and get away with it. I mean I have fundamentally deaf people on the staff, but the issue is in fact no different. They can not communicate as the rest of the people communicate. It doesn't mean that they aren't very good uses within the organisation. (Interview 4)

Swiss and Dutch, it's a good language to us but in a teleservices area an accent on the phone can be a little difficult to understand sometimes. (Interview 5)

In addition, a few pointed out that even with limited English, it was possible to do the job with computer support and that English improved rapidly when working in an English speaking environment.

Because most of, what I was getting to was, most people can overcome the issue of communicating in writing by computers. (Interview 15)

Some have made an incredible effort to immerse themselves in the language and seem to be almost fluent in a relatively small amount of time, you know 6 or 7 months. (Interview 9)

Many respondents who had completed the postal questionnaire and added comments onto the form agreed that English was a principal reason for immigrants' difficulties in getting jobs. However, like these participants, some were of the view that English language limitations need not pose a problem or were not unique to immigrants. Noted one: "Most of our engineering staff have to be taught to write English, not just immigrants!" Language among highly skilled and professional employees English limitations can also be overcome:

All immigrants go to great effort to develop their language skills for experience in everyday conversation and as a result have good working relationships with peers and supervisors.

So how do employers assess the adequacy of language skills when recruiting? No participant said that they used formal testing, or evidence of an immigrant applicant having achieved a TOFEL or IELTS score; indeed none mentioned the requirement for English language skills in order to immigrate to New Zealand as a skilled migrant. Employers relied on their personal assessment of ability to communicate:

It comes down to sitting down across the desk ...And if he can actually understand, yeah ok, they've passed the test. It's just that eye to eye contact, that voice situation. (Interview 15)

What we do to the immigrant, obviously if they can't keep up in the interview, quite often because quite a large part of the job in here involves report writing, I would ask them to bring a sample. And in some situations, because you never really know they've written the report themselves, in some situations we would get people to... write a report. (Interview 10)

Having emphasised the importance of English, some participants went on to acknowledge that perceived deficient language skills are a reason that immigrant applicants are disadvantaged:

Particularly in an interview process where you have to ask specific questions and they can't understand any of the context or the questions, it's quite difficult for them. (Interview 9)

While there were employers who regarded an applicant with deficient English skills as a nuisance, others did invite them to re-apply when language skills had improved.

If they come in, and I have had them come in right off the street and they can't even say hello ...I would probably tell them to look for one on one type coaching to accelerate the process and then attending courses as well to mix with other people. A combination of those two things and to come back and see us. (Interview 10)

Not all employers saw English language limitations as an absolute barrier to employment. One participant described overcoming English language limitations by using an interpreter at interview when the skills were desired.

I would bring a person from within the company that had the [interpreting] skills or I'd even hire somebody for a period of time to sit in on this interview and go through. There's been times when I've had an interpreter to come in and rather than speaking my language, I've spoken his native tongue, so I can get the real understanding of what I'm trying to say because this person has to know 100% what I'm after and I have to know 100% what he's trying to tell me, and if there is a problem between the language, there is a barrier, so quite often I'll bring in interpreters just to make sure. (Interview 3)

In reference to the responses to the questionnaire, 89.1 per cent of respondents employing immigrants agreed that the English language of employees was adequate for the job. However, as shown above, many when interviewed emphasised that deficient English skills were a barrier to their employment. Why then did the survey indicate there was not a problem? A possible reason was that immigrants with poorer English language skills were not employed. Another reason is that although in practice English proves adequate for the job, perceptions that colloquial English skills are deficient and pose difficulties in the work place endure. For example, one participant described at length the problems posed by poor English language and accents different from the New Zealand accent, but then said “but fortunately it’s not so critical in our business”.

Finally, in this section on English language, it is not English language alone that creates difficulties; communication is also a reflection of culture. Comments along these lines were made in relation to ethnicities as diverse as those who had come from several Asian, Middle Eastern and Pacific countries, and reflect a stereotyping along ethnic lines:

Also they [named ethnicity] have a little problem in agreeing with everything. I mean we often find they’ll say they understand and they know everything, they just don’t want to upset you, they understand and you find out later on they didn’t. They might have known they didn’t but they’re not going to say that. So you have to have this sort of double check conversation. (Interview 17)

The worst aspects in terms of the languages where this happens particularly with the [named ethnicity] type people, where they don’t like to refuse anything and so do you understand and yes, but they don’t, that is one of my problems with that. You have to go through it with them, let them do it, watch them do it, and make sure that they’ve got it. (Interview 7)

The issue of culture as a barrier to employing immigrants is further developed below.

### *Cultural and Organisational Fit*

Participants reflected on their concern that a new employee who was an immigrant, whose background was different, would fit into the company. In the words of a respondent “the first thing we look at is, ‘will that person fit into our company?’”

Their concerns were multifaceted: concern for existing employees, for the immigrant employees, for working relationships vertically and horizontally, for working styles, for workplace harmony. Managerial and supervisory positions in particular were perceived as sensitive and problematic, with differences in management style emphasised. These concerns for cultural fit, particularly in regard to specified cultures, are summed up in the following statements:

Will they fit into... the cultural fit? Will their approach make them workable with their superiors and their inferiors? I mean especially if you get somebody in a supervisory position, New Zealanders tend to ... run as a team rather than run a dictatorship. And a lot of foreign countries, in particular the countries that tend to immigrate to New Zealand such as [named countries], places like that, they tend to be more dictatorship type kind of managerial styles... (Interview 1)

[Named ethnicity] immigrants... find it very difficult to fit in with the productive team approach culture that New Zealand has ... Certainly having dealt with quite a large [named] population in the UK, they have a hierarchical social structure, you don't question your superior and as a superior you don't expect to be questioned so maybe that social structure, it certainly is totally opposite to the New Zealand philosophy as to what social structure should be. (Interview 19)

More than one participant placed a greater emphasis on cultural fit than on skills. And in commenting on culture, it was the culture of the organisation that was highlighted, not simply social culture.

Are they as a person going to fit in? That's the first thing. ...How they will relate, fit in to the staff here, not the other way round, but how in fact that they would relate to directors here and the staff. The second thing is obviously can they do the job? Are they qualified? Can they do the job? Can they make a difference to our business? Can they help us improve? (Interview 14)

A poor fit could potentially create huge problems for the employing company. A participant explained that "You see you can't bring a guy on whose going to set everything alight and then have to recruit for all the jobs, you know?" Poor integration of one or a group of employees can lead to poor teamwork and lowered productivity. Ethnic jokes were mentioned; some saw the behaviour as problematic, while others felt that an immigrant simply has to put up with the jokes. Several participants commented on the cultural difference in work ethic: while the manager may well value the high work ethic, it can also create problems among co-workers



who are threatened. A participant remarked that existing staff can be “scared for [their] job...they know how hard the Chinese work, they know they study”. Attitudes of superiority were also raised.

It's a question of how they integrate and how it's filtered through, because I've observed in some circumstances where the immigrant can be quite standoffish in a sense because they are very conscious of their own culture and see more negatives than positives about the New Zealand situation. (Interview 15)

We have no problems in assimilating these people to the workforce, ... their work methods are [exemplary]. And I guess to some extent we've got to be careful because that can create a bit of resentment amongst our own people. (Interview 2)

Others however believed that such problems were potential rather than actually experienced. Some participants believed there were few problems with fit, and that immigrant employees fitted in very well.

It's been easy, most of them have wanted to settle. Most of them have been younger and they seem to slip in really well, soon develop friends.... It's been great. And we try and bring them together from day one. (Interview 5)

Most of them seem, I think it's fair to say, that they don't bring any baggage along with them, if they do have any at all they leave it outside. (Interview 2)

As well as the perceived culturally rooted incompatible management styles, were the more subtle differences that immigrant employees needed to understand. Participants commented on the culture of work, where in New Zealand, “people are expected to act on their own initiative”, the company had experienced problems as “it is quite different from country to country”. Potential difficulties for these employees were attributed to a combination of language and culture.

The hard things to learn are ... communication, [and] learning how things operate ... in another country. I don't believe technical things are difficult at all, you've got those technicalities, you know a nurse is a nurse, an accountant is an accountant. You need to know the local statutes but they can all be learnt. (Interview 13)

Some participants saw the lack of familiarity with cultures as leading on to fear and prejudice.

I think particularly the Asian immigrants they do face some cultural prejudices, it's just everywhere...The Kiwi managers are not sure how to handle them because of cultural background, and ... they will trust the European first, they know how to handle them. Well, just this fear of the unknown, an unknown quality that they have never come across before. (Interview 12)

Concerns were also expressed by a number of participants for some immigrant workers; they were lonely, isolated, "they're basically on their own" and didn't integrate well. Some suggested that this was because of a failure on the part of the immigrant to "learn" the cultural subtleties; others felt that their co-workers were partly to blame.

Quite a few immigrants go into groups of people of their own nationality, and then that's a lot more difficult for them I feel to come out of that, they stay in there because that's where they feel safe, but they're not really learning the cultures, other language or the attitudes of the local people. (Interview 3)

I have noticed that [named] group keep to one side, keep to themselves, I don't think he's integrating. I think it's partly the people working around him, they don't make the effort to actually go and help them and integrate them. (Interview 8)

Referring back to the survey results, however, respondents did not indicate there was a problem in social mixing among immigrant and Kiwi employees: almost 90 per cent responded that immigrant employees sometimes or fully mixed with others, and 88.5 per cent Kiwi employees sometimes or fully mixed with immigrants. Yet when reflecting on the issue in interviews, cultural fit and mixing emerged as problematic.

Participants differed in how they might respond to the problems with cultural fit. Approaches included working with the immigrant employee, and a few suggested that existing employees needed to make more effort to get alongside immigrant employees struggling to integrate. The employer who commented on the "Kiwi mentality" that is threatened when it sees people working very hard suggested that the New Zealand employee needs to learn flexibility in attitudes to people and the different ways people might carry out their work.

A few participants discussed culture in terms of diversity and the importance of fostering diversity in organisations, increasingly important when labour and work are globalised. Indeed, ethnic or cultural characteristics can be an advantage for some

applicants to support a company in managing a diverse workforce. Others pointed out that diversity is not necessarily good for a company, nor is it straightforward.

Just recently we appointed a Human Resource Manager at a branch which is predominantly Samoan, and she's part Samoan so it's really important for that cultural, to get that cultural understanding in the workplace. So we're very lucky to find her because I think she can understand where people are coming from, what their issues are simply by knowing the culture ... so she'll be a real asset. (Interview 18)

Within our company it is very mixed. Occasionally it does cause some problems but overall it's good.... We now know that some people are a little bit wary of bringing particular types of immigrants into the company and what kind of experience they've got....it's just a whole learning thing, attitude, they cause problems for the rest of the staff and can become very disruptive. (Interview 5)

When a workforce becomes ethnically diverse, managers are faced with needing to limit and manage such disruptions. Though this as an issue was not explored in the interviews, one participant described having occasional pot luck lunches during the working day when employees were encouraged to share dishes from their countries. Managing diversity will become an increasingly important competence for managers as international migration of skills continues and workforces at company level become culturally and linguistically diverse. One manager alluded to a possible relationship between a manager's approach and those of the staff, saying he "personally likes it because I'm comfortable with that environment.... and maybe that flows on to the staff, I don't know". In the meantime, however, it appears that diversity even at a superficial level is not welcomed into many workplaces. Indeed, several suggested that kiwi employees can be threatened by diversity, and a participant indicated that an immigrant applicant who looks and behaves differently from a Kiwi counterpart is disadvantaged.

It's the manner, it's all the behavioural stuff. Because [when recruiting] and the majority are New Zealanders who understand New Zealand way of doing things, and then you have an immigrant who's qualified and skilled and can do the job. But have all these quirky behaviours. They don't look at you in the eye, or they don't dress as well as the other applicants, all those things. (Interview 6)

Respondents pointed out that companies differ regarding their capacity to absorb immigrant employees and diversity. For example, a large company will have more scope for allowing people to settle gradually into the firm. This may not be the case with very small, lean organisations which have to compete in the market place and

whose profit margin or funding basis is smaller. These differences may explain some of the differences between companies and the influence on their ability to absorb immigrants.

### *New Zealand work experience and qualifications*

Results of the survey questionnaire showed that over 72 per cent of employers were influenced to some or to a strong extent by New Zealand work experience when employing an immigrant, and nearly 67 per cent were similarly influenced by whether the applicant held a New Zealand qualification. Agreeing with these results, a fourth area frequently raised by participants in the interview as a barrier to employing immigrants was the lack of previous exposure to working in New Zealand, summed up in the following:

If that person then had some work experience that's an indicator to us that they're able to work within New Zealand. (Interview 10)

The issue is I have a job, I have 20 people who would love to have it. I've got to put the best person in for the job and I've got 4 or 5 who fit with all of the appropriate skills and I have you. You're just not as suitable as the other 10 applicants. The reality is that it may well be that the other 10 applicants, local knowledge, local experience makes them a better option. And ... they are going to get the job before you. (Interview 4)

However, a few participants dismissed such practices as evidence of employer discrimination, and as evidence of an unwillingness to take move away from the familiar.

Employers can use this as a reason not to employ, so if they don't really want to take somebody on they can say, "well really we're looking for experience here", knowing full well, you know it's just an excuse. And the other one you hear is you're overqualified and to me that's the biggest bunch of whatever you can throw at anyone because I don't care, he may be a doctor but... if he wants to work out here as a customer services officer ... (Interview 11)

Employers who insisted that immigrant job-seekers needed to have local work experience to even be considered for a position could then use another excuse for rejecting the application. Immigrant job-seekers could find themselves in a Catch-22 situation, where in their endeavours to get the required experience, they would

apply for positions for which their qualifications were higher than needed, only to find they were rejected because they were over-qualified. In addition, employers may reject the application to avoid a risk of being seen as exploitative.

I can appreciate that they (applicants too qualified for a position) would like to get some experience, some Kiwi experience, that's what they're after, but from an employer [perspective] we have to take care that that is not sending off the wrong signals to our own workforce. (Interview 2)

I think it is very, very hard. If you want to get New Zealand experience, the one thing you've got to do is lay low and set a lower salary, and the problem in New Zealand is the moment you do that the employers face risk by the publicity. So even in normal case I won't employ you. But our employee conditions are that you get lower pay, right, when the job might actually be worth higher pay. (Interview 12)

A number of additional comments were made in relation to some immigrant employees being over-qualified for the position – an outcome of the perceived mismatch between the skills immigration policy delivered and those that employers were seeking. However, this was seen as potentially leading to all kinds of problems by employers. These problems included remuneration, using the position (and company) as a stepping stone to a better position, inflation of credentials overall, and resentment among local applicants. For the employer in such a position, there was the risk of an upset workforce and the costs of having to recruit again.

The other thing is that has to be said is that I would get a call from an over qualified person offering to sell themselves cheaply to do a menial job, but that creates another nightmare for me, because he's over qualified, he doesn't want to stay, he may do only a mediocre job for a short period of time but he's going to be looking to move on all the time, to move on. It's bad management to let him [the over-qualified person] in the door because you're going to create a problem for him, where he's going to be doing a menial job, he's going to be creating for a problem from people working around him because he's going to be unhappy and you're going to have to recruit that job again. (Interview 1)

Another [issue] I would say is to be realistic in their salary expectations, some of them they've got an awful lot of qualifications but sometimes I have a feeling that they're expecting a lot more than we can provide. (Interview 11)

Similar risks were identified when immigrants went to a minor city unwillingly in order to get a job:

[Working where the first opportunity arises] does create problems in that you go down [to a provincial centre] at the expense of the company, and after a year you find another job, better job and you walk. And the company says “blimmin immigrants, they don’t stick, they’re here for a year and they walk”. (Interview 18)

However, for one respondent, an over-qualified employee was an opportunity; he could redeploy the person when the opportunity arose:

But I know that when I interview people for a particular job that I will ask them what they can do and what they can demonstrate to prove that they have done that kind of thing, and probably go far beyond what I’m looking for so that there’s additional skills should the need arise we can use them in other places. (Interview 3)

Participants’ descriptions of New Zealand industry highlighted that the small size of businesses meant that more generalist skills were needed, while immigrants often had highly specialised skills that were difficult to use. Unable to get a job, even to be granted an interview, some immigrants then sought to gain a New Zealand qualification to improve their chances. However, this strategy also might back-fire, making the job-seeker even more highly qualified for a very limited labour market and with even more specialised skills when employers were looking for more flexibility.

A lot of them applied for jobs and when I go back to talk to them I find they’re all at university doing PhDs trying desperately to up-skill. And for some of them I think it works. But a lot of them do the PhD in the [same] area, but still that area isn’t relevant to New Zealand.... And then if they’ve come out of university they haven’t got any experience so they’re caught in a double bind. (Interview 9)

The above comment leads onto the next issue frequently raised: in addition to skills seen as inappropriate to the employment level were concerns regarding work-readiness of immigrants for the New Zealand workplace, often because they had no work experience in New Zealand.

Even when an employer claimed not to require New Zealand work experience, the immigrant job-seeker might still be disadvantaged because of the greater difficulties employers faced in verifying qualifications and work experience. The greater

difficulty in verifying work experience when that experience was off-shore was acknowledged as disadvantaging immigrant applicants.

I never ask a foreigner for New Zealand experience. But I do check references.... Again I don't insist on work experience here, just good experience. I can check UK references as easily as I can check New Zealand ones. [Regarding Chinese references] I've had a go a couple of times, it's quite difficult because they don't usually speak English. (Interview 17)

And then you have to be able to make reference to the work that they have done prior to that. So you have to be able to talk to someone about behavioural issues and whatever you need to do that, how does this person react or how are they a good, reliable, punctual and ..... do you have any problems with them?... And this puts immigrants on the back foot. (Interview 1)

Another participant disagreed that immigrants were disadvantaged by the greater effort needed to verify background:

I think that all you're doing is checking out, you would do the same as if you were interviewing a Kiwi, instead you got this person [from overseas], you would still check them even if you were just ringing up the ex employer. Or if they were from abroad, you would be asking them what references they've brought. I think from talking to people after a while, and then you go down the same track with different avenues, you start to find out if they're telling the same story each time. (Interview 3)

One respondent, and only one, raised concerns about the falsification of qualifications. The difficulty for New Zealand employers in verifying qualifications and work history is, as shown later, a reason that puts immigrant applicants at a disadvantage when competing against local applicants, a point that was raised repeatedly:

[When] employing somebody whose got those particular skills, if they haven't got those skills then they've got qualifications that are false. [If you investigate] you will find a lot of [named country] people will come back with quite long qualifications, they've got ONCs and BSCs and all this, but when you get down they're probably welders or a fitter and turner, and I've found this a few times. But then I've meet other [named] who are well qualified and are genuine, so whether there's people getting

back street qualifications. But that's one of the things that you have to look for. (Interview 3)

A curious paradox has emerged. On the one hand, many participants in both the survey and interviews acknowledged their dependence on and appreciation of immigrants' skills and work ethic, found their English language ability was adequate for the job and enjoyed the richness and interest associated with diversity. On the other hand, employers displayed an aversion to the risk associated with employing immigrants and engaged in a number of strategies to avoid employing suitable applicants. The following section further explores additional explanations, other than those discussed above, as to why employers might be averse to employing immigrants.

## **The Burden of Recruiting**

One set of reasons for a reluctance to employ immigrants is the sense of responsibility employers feel when making appointments. Another set of issues relates to strategies immigrant job-seekers were reported to engage in that employers found unhelpful or frankly off-putting.

### *Employer related issues*

In employing someone to a position, several respondents emphasised that it did not matter who was appointed so long as the skills needed were offered. Personal attributes, including background, were not an issue when it came to required skills; some were at pains to point out they did not discriminate.

In each instance it's got to be who's the best person for the job and the discrimination if you like to use the term is as to performance in the position, not anything else. (Interview 4)

At the same time, employers agreed that in the case of many companies, there was "no fat in the system"; they were "lean", and therefore preferred to select an applicant who would "hit the ground running". Added to this, many companies have to be very competitive, and an efficient operation can make the difference to business survival. An obvious implication is that where two equivalently qualified applicants were applying for a position, it was the one with easily verifiable qualifications and work experience and who spoke colloquial English who would get the job over an unknown applicant without local qualifications and experiences and whose English was different.



In addition, the increasingly complex employment environment provides difficulties for immigrants in getting work. Participants referred several times to employment law, in particular the difficulties in getting rid of an unsatisfactory employee, and this can make them reluctant to consider an applicant whose background is unfamiliar. Others referred to the risk for employers, subject to heavy fines for employing someone without permission to work. They described applicants who produced bank account numbers, tax numbers and references from employers but who did not actually have the necessary work permit or residency. Employers recruiting a worker, any worker, described the sense of responsibility in appointing the right person.

Actually employing somebody is a very frightening experience for employers at any level, especially managerial level, so it's getting it right and reducing that risk of getting it wrong. If you're familiar with the companies they've worked with in the past.....so I think it's that familiarity. (Interview 19)

You see I find employing people is quite difficult, it's quite a difficult job and in this company like ours ... quite small, we don't have experience in the interview process, we don't even have much of a turnover of staff. (Interview 14)

Participants spoke of their personal emotional difficulties in having to reject applications from desperate immigrants. Said one: "And doesn't you heart go out. It makes the heart beat properly". Participants believed the emotional toll on employers to be a reason why many preferred to work through recruitment agencies rather than deal with applicants directly (acknowledging that agencies avoided short-listing undesired candidates), used standard rejection letters, and did not grant interviews.

A lot of employers in my experience try and soften blows as to why you don't get employed because it's human nature, you don't actually like hurting peoples' feelings and there's nothing worse than telling someone who's desperate for work they can't have a job...You don't want to write a letter back which is negatively dealing to somebody's enthusiasm, hope or whatever. If you like it could well be a situation where a lot of those employers have a very standard letter of reply (Interview 4)

Your heart really goes out to them, but at the end of the day it is a business and we only had so many vacancies and it really is awkward. But they say "I'm trying to get a job, I'll do anything, I will do anything in the

world, I just need a job, I need the experience.... And I've got a baby at home and I've got this and that" and they'll go into a whole lot of detail. (Interview 10)

The situation for employers, in their view, is complex. And for the mix of issues described- issues to do with company demands, employment law, human rights law, privacy law, their own experiences and emotional considerations- many employers demonstrated an aversion to risk in making appointments. Employers complained of the pressure they were under with frequent approaches for employment being made by both "non-English speaking immigrants" and "organisations asking us to place immigrants in work experience programmes and in permanent employment". Immigrant applicants were, it appeared, seen as higher risk, largely because employers were unfamiliar with their backgrounds.

#### *Negative tactics used by job-seekers*

Participants went on to describe approaches engaged in by many immigrant job-seekers that they viewed as off-putting and unhelpful, ultimately working against the chances of the applicant in particular, and immigrants in general, in getting a job.

They're persistent. They arrived in, ring you up, first to check that you've got their CV, yes we have, and what are you doing about it, well we'll see how many applicants we get, we're still waiting on the closing date, expect a call from us. (Interview 2)

We had one gentleman who had applied for four positions with us in this one section over a period of 18 months, and wrote a terribly angry letter about how we were anti immigrants and we were basically not selecting him for any interviews because of the fact that he had immigrated. ...So that, although he does the same job the knowledge that he had was different and he was terribly, terribly upset. And I can see why he couldn't get a job, and he couldn't understand why. (Interview 9)

Some employers described "tricks" used by immigrants to increase their chances of getting to interview stage. Curriculum vitae (CV) may exaggerate or falsify experience; an applicant with limited English may use a friend with adequate English to make a phone-call; an applicant may adopt an English name. Several commented negatively on "cold calling" and on being sent unsolicited, unfocused CVs. An employer who found the CVs unhelpful said: "it takes time to deal with them". Another asked: "what could I do to that? I'll stick it in a file." Still others simply returned the CV to the sender with a note saying there were no vacancies.

We get a lot of CVs and I have boxes of them, immigrants, people who are proposing to come to New Zealand. There are those who are already here, there are those who are looking at coming, and I would get hundreds of queries a year from qualified people....it is very difficult. (Interview 9)

A lot of them would just come in, knock on your door and in a way demand to see the person to hand them their CV. Oh yes, and I guess from an employer's viewpoint we didn't like that and particularly the demanding way, I guess that was just a cultural thing. (Interview 2)

However, one participant found the practice useful as "it saves me money from advertising." Others were also critical of the ways CVs were set out, complaining that these were different from the form common in New Zealand, or were not focused according to the position being applied for.

You get the occasional one that's just obviously a blanket CV that's gone to a whole lot of people, which I don't think helps anybody. (Interview 5)

So they perhaps need guidance on how to write up a Kiwi CV. It is different. It focuses on, for example, accomplishments which, for example, in South Africa we tend not to. (Interview 18)

[Need help] to present their CVs in a manner that we were used to as opposed to the subservient ways, particularly the Asians, how they write. (Interview 2)

For other participants, the format of a CV was "definitely not an issue for us". One went further, saying that if an employer was put off considering an application because of a CV:

...that would indicate to me that there is a problem with the employer rather than the employee in that the employer has got blinkers on. So perhaps the question needs to be turned around a little bit, in that what is wrong with our employers that they can't recognise some things a little bit different. (Interview 7)

Unable to get a job or even to be granted an interview, some immigrant job-seekers offered to do voluntary work so as to gain the needed New Zealand work experience. Here, too, many were unsuccessful. One claimed he felt "a bit guilty about exploiting them". Another described how one such volunteer who, in her eagerness to learn, had to be put off because of the demands on the time of other staff. One participant was simply suspicious of motives:

I had a first experience of [voluntary work] last week, and one of the people on the shortlist was a German lady and she didn't make it in the final selection. And she said well she's prepared to work for us for free on a voluntary basis. And I'm not used to it, people offering to work for free. Then I realise what she's actually doing, she's actually... it's probably a requirement for her visa that she has to be working, doesn't need to be getting paid anything, just employment I suppose. I'm assuming. Why would she want to work for nothing? (Interview 18)

Some participants referred to possible complications for the company. Employment law requires a contract, and there are other implications:

If you were bringing somebody on in a voluntary situation, it would mean that you would create a contract for them based on no remuneration. But the more important things would be the company policies, the company health and safety policies, and professional ethics involved in actually having somebody with you... You would be creating almost a one way situation, you would have no way of protecting yourself against professional misconduct or anything. It would be very, very hard. (Interview 1)

A few participants, however, were open to supporting such requests.

If somebody comes in [and asks] "can I come in and work for 2 weeks to get some experience"? No problems, on that basis they work to get experience. At the end of if you can offer them work or a reference and say hey, this guy really does work hard and he has learned well, it's something that they can take and say to another employer, look I've already done this. (Interview 7)

Participants paradoxically both understood the frustrations of immigrant job seekers leading to the use of a range of strategies, and at the same time, were put off such job-seekers because of the use of those strategies. Thus the techniques some immigrants engaged in compounded the existing disadvantage of their having qualifications and work experience not easily verified, along with not being native speakers of New Zealand English and employer anxieties as to whether they would fit in the workplace. Participants were therefore invited to comment on how immigrants could make themselves more employable.

## How Job Seekers and Companies Can Improve Immigrant Employment

To conclude, the participants reflected on how they could improve their chances of being employed and fitting in to New Zealand workplaces. In addition, practices employers used to assist immigrant job seekers to find jobs and to help them settle into the company were explored.

### *Advice to immigrant job seekers*

Employers, as it appeared from their reflections reported earlier, are influenced by how they can ensure, with the least risk and difficulty, that an applicant has the right skills for the position, the right culture for the company and workplace, and can communicate well, preferably in colloquial English. An applicant who did not present and market him/herself well, and whose credentials were more difficult to verify than other applicants, was disadvantaged. Employers, being “very busy” people and under pressure, explained they “take the line of least resistance” in the task to appoint the best possible applicant. Not surprisingly, much of the advice participants offered to immigrant job seekers mirrors the issues raised that lead to employers being wary of employing immigrant applicants. Some advice was very pragmatic, for example that immigrants simply need to demonstrate to the prospective employer that all documentation was in order:

Make sure they’ve got permission to stay. (Interview 5)

We’d want to see permits, stamps, passport. (Interview 18)

That they have their qualifications verified too, you know it’s not much use putting a whole lot of qualifications written in whatever, African or Dutch or whatever, because I don’t read that and I suppose I guess it’s a bit of when in Rome you know. (Interview 11)

That their language skills are bang on and that they make it very easy to verify the quality code and verify the type of duties that they were doing to make the process really easy. ... I think that if you got involved in social circles and became a lot more colloquialised...I think if they go to the NZQA and have their qualifications assessed and they produce a certificate that’s immensely helpful. (Interview 1)

Admitting that “immigrants are on the back foot” compared with a local applicant, participants advised:

The most important, they've got to be presentable, they've got to be clean, they've got to have an understanding of courtesy. (Interview 15)

...I think that if the work record is good...If they've got a reference, a written reference, that looks good... it looked good if the guy's been in that job for 8 years. (Interview 1)

However, as we have seen, immigrant job seekers consistently encounter barriers to getting a job because overseas qualifications and work experience are regarded as not relevant to the New Zealand setting. What, then, do employers advise immigrant job seekers to do to persuade an employer?

Then try and show the learnings of your experience to the Kiwi experience, which often you come up against when you haven't got Kiwi experience. So it's to show whatever experience you've got from whatever country you come from, how similar and how relative it is to the Kiwi one....(Interview 18)

Well you have to sort of prove that your qualifications are... we have to sort of match what they mean in New Zealand and whether they're valid or not and also the language thing. (Interview 17)

In addition, several participants stressed the importance of applicants "doing their homework".

They need to do some pretty good homework. They should ... work out who they would like to work for, and [prepare a] letter, type written, that does a number of things. It quite quickly establishes the sort of response they get, it also illustrates quite clearly to their respective employer that you have got somebody who can actually speak enough English to make contact. (Interview 15)

I think they need to do their homework before they go into the interview. We've interviewed some people that just ... they haven't done their homework. They can ask and should ask at least for the job description, some information on the company, obviously it is standard practice for a Kiwi even applying for a job, but even more so for an immigrant. Do your homework, find out about the company, what is the job that you're applying for, focus your CV directly. Just make sure you're prepared, make sure you know what you're applying for, target your application to that. (Interview 18)

I think one thing is they need to ensure that prerequisite qualifications are obtained. So if whatever job they're [applying for] requires some prerequisite qualification obviously they'll make sure they've got it. (Interview 18)

For an immigrant applicant to be able to demonstrate equivalence, it is necessary to first gain an accurate picture of the New Zealand employment context in their field. But again, as demonstrated in this report, employers are reluctant to open up the workplace to "cold callers" and unsolicited applications, viewing rejected applicants who seek to find out why as "pushy", and discouraging those who offer to work voluntarily. However, a few participants advised immigrant job seekers to do exactly this. Employers also said they were influenced by a well focused CV.

Don't just look in the newspapers, go and actually sell yourself to companies, knock on doors. (Interview 18)

With a CV you're trying to sell yourself, it's picking the things out that are a little bit different, that makes you different from the next person. (Interview 3)

A final area of advice concerned flexibility on the part of the immigrant job-seeker. Participants had indicated in the interviews the problems they encountered of "over-qualified" immigrant applicants. However, they also advised immigrants to be prepared to settle for something less than their qualifications and work experience deserved:

Some people are quite fussy, actually turn down job offers which is crazy. You can't be fussy if you're looking at establishing a new life in a country, you've got to go where you get the opportunity.... don't expect to come to Auckland and get a job in Auckland. Taking the first opportunity and getting the Kiwi experience.... be prepared to come in perhaps at the lower level, prepared to start at a more junior position and climb the ladder, prepared to earn less to go the extra mile to show they're really interested....go anywhere in the country, be prepared to work yourself (Interview 18)

Acknowledging that some immigrants, having done all the above, still could not get a job, the next step was to up-skill or re-qualify. A few participants observed that English language skills and confidence was declining for some unsuccessful job-seekers. One commented that "Asians tend to associate with Asians, if there's other Asians around they tend to immediately get back to their mother tongue"; it was

important, she said, to make the effort to mix and communicate with Kiwis. A few referred to immigrants attending English language course but whose English was “still pretty bad”. Another option for them was to return to university, but noting another participant’s concerns that some were studying in the wrong field, it is important an appropriate degree is chosen. However, well-chosen areas of study could enhance chances of employment, as indicated in the following comment referring to unemployed engineers.

They’re coming in with their degree not being able to get a job, going back and doing a MBA ... and certainly that tends to be helping because a lot of that is a group work, team skills, English language, all that is sort of happening, work experience in New Zealand because they’ve got to do a project as well.... they’ve got to do so many practical hours and so during all that, and that’s helpful. (Interview 10)

Reflecting the information participants gave, the onus was on the immigrant job-seekers to demonstrate their suitability for a position and if not, to take steps to make themselves more employable. However, as we have also seen, even these measures were no guarantee of success, especially in a context of employers being risk averse in general, and in some cases, prejudiced against employing certain immigrants. The question needs also to be asked, what can companies do to make themselves more attractive and accessible to immigrants? This question is significant in view of a growing skills shortage and reliance on importing skills.

#### *Company initiatives and responsibilities*

Several employers believed companies had no role in supporting an immigrant employee. One participant disagreed strongly with the position that the company had no responsibilities toward an employee, seeing it as an ethical issue. In addition while some participants declared a new employee needed to “hit the ground running”, others’ expectations were that realistically it can take time to reach expected productivity, up to 2-3 months. Employers who occasionally recruited from overseas tended to assist an employee newly arrived from overseas; this included both those who believed a company need not offer support in common with those employers who agreed the company should offer some support to immigrant employees. Commonly companies provided accommodation for the first 2-4 weeks, provided information about the area, schools, house rents and so on.

I doubt there’s much the company can do to assist an immigrant employee ... on the basis that whoever I employ is more efficient than the one who drops out or doesn’t get selected. So if I need to employ and carry costs in



trying to employ immigrants up, then immigrant actually loses opportunity to get employed. (Interview 12)

There's really no special treatment with any particular group at all including Kiwis. What we do is, we would put together a wee pack for them, we basically shoot down to the information centre, we usually have them in stock, pamphlets on Auckland and all that kind of stuff .... And we also put together a list of rental prices and schools and things like that....we sort of say as a rule we'll pay for two weeks accommodation and we help them get set up. (Interview 10)

We have a really generous relocation policy so when they come they can bring their life with them, you can bring your children. And when they hit the ground we supply them with a month's accommodation, somewhere that's really nice, really functional. We make sure that they've got a car so that they can get around. (Interview 9)

Participants who were receptive to the employer having some responsibility in supporting immigrant employees appeared to be more proactive in supporting their immigrant employees, once appointed, to settle in and to remedy any drawbacks, than to assist applicants to gain employment. At a fundamental level, companies and employers who recruit into companies, need to be welcoming to potential and to new employees who because of language, culture, past work experience and the like, differ from locally raised and educated employees. Conveying an attitude that the employee is valued as a person and as an employee was reflected by a few participants.

I am really keen to take people who's English is not so good and have already lived in New Zealand for a length of time because that just seems a reflection on us, that we haven't made friends with them. (Interview 13)

I know there are a lot of services available in town for looking after immigrants, but I guess because they are special to us, I look after them right from the beginning. (Interview 6)

Concrete steps to support immigrant job seekers in getting the required New Zealand work experience were described. A participant described a situation that she said was not uncommon among companies in that sector, of agreeing with an immigration consultant to employ skilled immigrants in less skilled positions "to get the experience, the language, the communication, the how things worked in New Zealand", with no commitment by either party of subsequently being appointed in

the skilled area. Then, when the immigrants were professionally registered in New Zealand, they were appointed to the appropriate position as a vacancy arose.

For many employers, supporting immigrant employees reflected basic principles of human concern and friendship being extended by managers and employees of the company. Further, these participants acknowledged that for employees to be able to focus on their work, people and families needed to feel settled and to have addressed housing, children's schooling and the like. Some widened such support beyond the employee to the spouse and family, for example suggesting that wives of existing and new employees could go shopping and socialise together.

I think it's important to show interest in the individual and their family. ...I think it's just to show an interest, to ask, remember to ask. "how are you settling in? How is your family? Is there anything we can do to help?" It's as simple as that. "What problems are you having? What support is their family getting while they're at work?" (Interview 18)

Sometimes it's very difficult for families, husbands or wives who are trying to come and work here, but they've got to find a life, find a house, find the kids schools, find plumbers if they need one, where do you get an Inland Revenue number from? So we help them with all of that. We give them time in those first couple of months to say if you need to go to home to find a plumber, leave work and find a plumber. You know don't sort of appear working and think I've got to go and find a plumber and your wife will be unhappy because of whatever or the husband, so go and do what you need to do. And so the first couple of months they try to be here [at work], but they can't be as they're settling into life. (Interview 9)

A few participants discussed the issue of diversity generally, and that included immigrants from different cultures in the workplace which necessitated flexible measures to accommodate diversity. Criticising what he saw as a "hard-nosed" approach, a participant was adamant that employers were responsible for the culture of a workplace and the accommodation of differences.

Unfortunately it tends to be pretty much one way with most employers..... most of them are looking at the bottom line and the bottom line only..... And I mean going back in terms of the immigrants... it's that ethic that you're looking for and that's got to be a two way thing. You've got to look after them and that means money, it means looking after them in terms of if they need time for something, being reasonably flexible to be able to provide them that time. And it may be that they have customs that mean that some days... they wanted to celebrate Chinese New Year, for

argument's sake, well okay, you've got to be reasonably flexible. (Interview 7)

We do have a very flexible employment contract so if different immigrants, either on their family or different ethnic situation, require different leave arrangements, and that can happen when you've got the different Muslim calendars and such like, we can handle that. I don't think there's any practical problem, I think it's probably an understanding problem. (Interview 8)

Buddy and mentorship schemes were used by a number of employers to support the new employee through the initial period and to "get them into the right way of doing things, show them around". Although buddy/mentoring schemes were raised frequently in interviews, only 7.3 per cent of survey respondents said that they used such schemes. While such approaches were not limited to immigrant employees, participants acknowledged that the importance was likely to be greater for an immigrant unfamiliar with New Zealand workplaces and cultures. These buddies were used both to introduce the immigrant employee to the workplace, and/or to support them in settling into society.

One of the things that we've found is that you provide a mentor if you like, and when they have their on-the-job induction, that person is the one that hangs round with them for awhile... he's the one that will take him around, introduce him, look after him, show him where the loo is, where to have his lunch, boil the jug, all that sort of stuff. (Interview 11)

Also described by a few participants was putting immigrant employees new to the area in contact with the ethnic community, or with community groups that focus on supporting immigrants from particular cultures. As an example:

What we've tended to do is to contact the local community group relating to that country and ask for help. There are some people who physically spend their lives assisting Hong Kong/Chinese people who arrive here so you can get hold of people like that. (Interview 4)

Several participants spoke about the value of certain immigrant employees to the company, a recognition that would then lead on to the company investing in improving their language skills. Also among survey respondents, almost 12 per cent said the company supported English tuition.

We have a lot of people who don't speak English as their main language, and some of them are more difficult to communicate with than others, and that does sometimes produce performance issues. But ...there is a lot of patience [among other employees] [it takes] a lot of time and they're prepared to make that effort, because the knowledge that these people bring is really useful to us. (Interview 9)

We try to work round [English limitations]. If the person that we really want, and there's a barrier there, then I'd arrange courses for people to go to, English classes. [We have done this] Two or three times. We use the Polytech. (Interview 3)

Employers used a range of approaches to improve the English language skills of valued immigrant employees.

We sent him to an English language school here in downtown. He went to that twice a week, we paid for that, so it was an investment from our part. He went for about 6 months, then from that we hired somebody on a weekly basis, on a one to one so that he could learn to speak the English that's required in this office, not just some form of classroom situation so we spent a lot of money on him. (Interview 6)

Once [English] becomes an issue in the workplace we put them on courses and we let their families do those courses too, and sometimes we quietly fund them but we don't let people [know], it's not something that's common but we will try to help them. Because the faster they become fluent in English, the faster they can communicate and assimilate into the culture. (Interview 9)

The level of investment the company made and the type of support given depended on the nature and degree of English language that was required.

We've sent him off to a course, you know English as a second language, that type of course, to try and help him to brush off his accent. We pay for it. (Interview 11)

We do try to help them through buddying them with aid agencies and things like that, or putting them on writing courses or putting them on things like Toastmasters. (Interview 9)

Finally, a few participants provided or supported an immigrant employee in educational needs to be able to carry out his/her work in the New Zealand context. Referring back to the survey, over 14 per cent of respondents said they offered training to immigrant employees. An example of employers providing work experience in a low skill position to enable a skilled immigrant to gain the required New Zealand experience and professional registration was given above. In addition, employers frequently provided training to unskilled and semi-skilled employees. While in-house training at both skilled and less skilled levels was not uncommon, company support to complete external qualifications was not raised by most participants. This position is no surprise in the light of the widespread view that a new employee needed to be work-ready. Sometimes company support for external training was conditional on the employee agreeing “to stay with us for a year, two years, three years”.

Companies can offer assistance in terms of education, just Kiwi education, could be specific, just tax laws, accounting principles, just defining the labour law, I don't know. We would [pay the fees] providing it was work related, providing they can contribute into improving that person's performance of the job to the company. (Interview 18)

## **Conclusions**

New Zealand is, like other developed countries, facing a skills shortage as demographic ageing and declining birth rates reduces the proportion of working age adults. This situation is compounded as New Zealand skills are actively recruited by other countries. The trend has been recognised by employers and policy makers alike, and is a reason for changes to immigration policy to facilitate skilled immigrants in choosing New Zealand. While many previous studies have consistently shown from immigrants' perspectives that immigrants encounter barriers in securing employment in New Zealand, the present study demonstrates that employers are indeed averse to the perceived risks of employing immigrant job seekers, including those employers who reported positively on their immigrant employees.

Participants in the follow-up interview who employed immigrants were, on the whole, very positive about their contribution and performance. Paradoxically, many were also anxious about taking the risk of employing an immigrant and commonly showed a preference for a local applicant. The reasons were various: concern about communication, cultural fit, impact on existing employees, difficulties, perceived or real, in verifying qualifications and previous work experience, and so on. The undercurrent of these anxieties appeared to be a fear of the unfamiliar, of difference and diversity.

While many employers indicated in the interviews that the onus for preparing for and securing employment was that of the immigrant, if New Zealand is to move from a situation of wasting immigrant talent to utilising their skills, immigrants' initiatives need to be matched by action on the part of employers and New Zealand society as a whole. The need to be more proactive in facilitating immigrants to enter the labour market was noted by some questionnaire respondents, for example:

There is a large pool of highly skilled immigrant labourer in New Zealand that is largely untapped.

All I have met are keen to make a new home here and to be part of the New Zealand culture as well as their own. I think the country could do more to help them settle, perhaps an introduction to the way Kiwis work here.

# DISCUSSION

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The results of the mixed method study involving a survey and complementary in-depth interviews with 19 participants are now discussed in the light of New Zealand and international research, and where such research is unavailable, reference to selected media is made for the purpose of demonstrating support or otherwise for the findings. The results are discussed in the following sections:

- Profile of businesses and CEO respondents;
- Profile of the immigrant workforce;
- Employers' experiences of immigrant employees;
- Perceived suitability of immigrants;
- Policies and support regarding employment of immigrants;
- Employers' advice to immigrant job-seekers on making themselves employable.

The response rate to the postal survey was just over 40 per cent, a similar response rate to that of Wallis (2006a), one of the few other New Zealand surveys of employers. Out of 246 businesses surveyed that returned completed questionnaires, 70.3 per cent reported they did employ immigrants. Regarding the employment of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) only, 69.5 per cent of companies engaged in international business, trade and tourism, and 64.3 per cent central and local government organisations, included NESB immigrants in their workforce (Watts and Trlin, 1999; 2000).

## **Profile of businesses and CEOs**

Participants in the present study included most businesses in the 'Top 500' Database plus a random selection of Auckland and Wellington companies from the Yellow Pages, and yielded companies reflecting all industry categories and sizes; use of the 'Top 500' database resulted in a skewing toward large companies. The New Zealand Immigration Service national study of employers who had contact with the Immigration Service and had recruited immigrants was much larger at 804 respondents, and also included a range of sizes and industry categories and a mix of companies located at one or more sites (Wallis, 2006a). Immigration Services (2003) found public sector employers more highly represented among employers who made job offers to immigrants; the present study did not identify public and private sector. The 1998 study of Benson-Rea et al was small with a low response rate and focused only on IT companies, and the Hudson Report in 2006, while large, involving 1705 employers, gave no descriptive information on the sample. The present study found

that in almost 87 per cent of companies responding, immigrants contributed up to 25 percent of the workforce, but in Wallis (2006a), a lower 56 per cent of companies included 25 per cent or less immigrant employees, meaning that more companies in the 2005 survey were employing more immigrants. Wallis (2006a) found that a third of respondents were themselves immigrants, much higher than in the present study where over 70 per cent were New Zealand-born. This comparison suggests that employers who are themselves immigrants may be more inclined to employ immigrants.

## **Profile of the immigrant workforce**

In the present study, respondents were asked to exclude immigrants from the UK and Australia in their answers, but otherwise no exclusions (e.g. on immigration category and recency of migration) were made. Having done this, the Pacific Islands emerged as the main source country for immigrant employees, followed by Asian countries. Wallis (2006a) made no such exclusions, but sampling on the basis of recent skilled immigrants demonstrated that over half were from ESANA countries (Europe, South Africa and North America). Both studies showed that more male than female immigrants were employed: in the present study, immigrant workforces in 86 per cent of companies were mainly male, a pattern that reflected the New Zealand labour force generally. In June 1998, 88.5 percent of males and 61.7 percent of females were employed full-time (StatisticsNZ, 1998). These immigrant employees in both studies tended to be employed full-time, with males more likely than females to be in full-time employment. However, the studies differed in the occupation of the immigrant employees: whereas in the present study, they were spread almost equally across skilled and less skilled occupations, Wallis (2006a) found that the greater numbers were in managerial and professional positions, a reflection of the sampling approach. The Immigration Research Programme (2003) study on skilled migrant labour outcomes agreed with Wallis's findings and reported from 387 companies that a majority were in skilled occupations, including managerial, professional and technical. And that immigrants in professional and skilled trade occupations were more likely to have come from ESANA countries, while those not from ESANA countries, particularly from North Asia, were more likely to occupy sales and service positions.

However, numerous studies from immigrants' perspectives (e.g. Department of Internal Affairs, 1996; Winkleman and Winkelmann, 1998; Boyd, 2003; Wallis, 2006b; and see Introduction and Background) confirm that commonly, skilled immigrants are more likely than New Zealand-born to be unemployed and to be employed in positions not commensurate with their skills. Indeed, survey respondents in the present study indicated that while over 65 per cent of immigrant



employees were using pre-migration qualifications, over 19 per cent were not. At the same time, the finding of the present survey that one-third of immigrants (excluding those from the U.K. and Australia) are employed in professional/managerial levels, and that immigrants are evenly spread across all broad occupational levels, suggests that immigrants are in fact moving into New Zealand businesses at senior levels. This pattern is even more pronounced when ESANA immigrants are included (Wallis, 2006a).

Social networks and social capital are seen as affecting immigrants in relation to employment. For example, social capital can improve on immigrants' chances of finding employment. The High Hopes survey (Department of Internal Affairs, 1996) reported that some of their respondents had found that their friends and family in New Zealand could often be a source of job information and opportunities. In the present survey, only 15 per cent of employers reported that they frequently recruited through networks of existing immigrant employees, while 82 per cent seldom or never did so, and the remaining 3 per cent did not know. There were no differences in pattern in relation to the gender of the employee. Use of social networks was slightly more likely when recruiting to on-call or piece-work employment than to other contract types. When the category of employee was related to such recruitment practices, using networks of existing employees was frequently carried out only for semi-skilled and unskilled categories of employee, while such methods of recruitment were seldom or never used to recruit managerial/professional and skilled trade employees.

## **Employers' overall experiences of immigrant employees**

New Zealand research on employer perspectives agree that immigrants are hired because employers wish to recruit the best skills possible and when those skills are otherwise unavailable in the labour market (Watts and Trlin, 1999; 2000; Immigration Research Programme, 2003; Wallis, 2006a). Respondents in the present study also explained that when recruiting, they were seeking to appoint the best skills for the job, were more likely to employ a New Zealander than an immigrant when skill sets were deemed equivalent, and generally appointed an immigrant only when the required skills could not be sourced locally. Once appointed, the study found overwhelmingly that employers of immigrants were satisfied with their work ethic, performance and added value to the organisation. Further, both survey results and in-depth interviews agreed on the value of immigrants to their employers. In the 2003 Immigration Research Programme survey of employers, a high 88 per cent assessed performance as very good or good, while only 3 per cent rated it as poor. Wallis (2006a), too, found that a majority (81 per cent) rated the immigrant employees' work performance as good or very good, and only 4 per cent rated

performance negatively. Reasons for a positive rating broadly agreed with employer comments in the present study: they had the required skills; a positive attitude; work performance was higher than expected and higher than other employees; and they contributed needed skills and experience.

Some employers in the present study commented that immigrants were reported as willing to do some jobs unattractive to New Zealanders (e.g. menial work). There is some support for this in Wallis (2006a) who indicated that 31 per cent of employers in agricultural and fishery industries who used immigrant labour reported difficulty in filling jobs. A small number also noted that in a context of increasing ethnic diversity and the globalisation of operations, immigrants provide important points of contact between the company and specific customer groups and communities. Employing people from diverse communities was identified as a means for ensuring that the workplace reflected the community served, for example in personal caring and social occupations and call centres. Indeed, Mezoff and Johns (1998) have pointed out that global diversity in neighbourhoods and workplaces in most Western economies is presenting new challenges to management and forcing management and work process to adjust to diversity.

A participant in the interviews remarked on a perception that immigrants do not stay in the job, especially a job that does not fully use their skills and knowledge, and that is not in a preferred location (e.g. not in Auckland). The 2003 Immigration Services survey of employers who had offered jobs to applicants found that 60 per cent were still in the job, with those from ESANA countries staying longer in the job than those from Asian countries. In nearly 40 per cent of cases, the immigrant had changed employer, 10 per cent had returned to their home country, and 16 per cent were found to be unsuitable or the contract had ended. There was a resulting perception by some respondents that the immigrant had used the employer as a stepping stone (Immigration Research Programme, 2003).

## **Perceived suitability of immigrants**

While the experiences of immigrants as employees is generally positive from the point of view of New Zealand employers, the literature focusing on the immigrants' perception shows that immigrants believe there are few job opportunities for them in their fields, they are disadvantaged due to their lack of New Zealand work experience and accented or limited English, and there are problems recognising their qualifications (e.g. Lidgard, 1996; Department of Internal Affairs, 1996). The present study highlighted a paradox: on the one hand, the experiences of employers with their immigrant employees (excluding those from UK and Australia) were overwhelmingly positive; on the other hand, employers were averse to employing

immigrants. The reasons for their reluctance to employ an immigrant were largely predicated on three issues: English language and communication, cultural and organizational fit, and their unfamiliarity with overseas qualifications and experience.

### *English language and communication*

In the survey, more than 89 per cent of survey respondents indicated that immigrant employees' English was adequate for the job. Moreover, when English language difficulties did occur, they were "quickly overcome" and once employed, English language skills were observed to quickly improve. Previous studies also confirm that the English of immigrant employees is adequate for the job, e.g. 90 per cent of employers agreed that job performance was not affected by English difficulties (Wallis, 2006a). And in the Immigration Research Programme (2003) study, only 15 per cent were reported as having difficulties with spoken English, but for reading and writing, this fell to 4 and 6 per cent respectively. However, the same survey found that in 31 per cent of cases, English was a reason (and the leading reason) given by employers reporting on 93 employees who had difficulties in doing the job, especially for immigrants from Asia but also for those from ESANA countries. Only one respondent (of the 3 per cent who rated immigrant employees' job performance as poor) gave English problems as the reason for poor job performance.

English language emerged in the present study as a key reason for an employer's aversion to employing immigrants. Interview participants indicated that English could be the only or the principal reason why immigrants were disadvantaged, they were put off by accents, by hesitancy and fear of having to spend additional time explaining matters, and the like. Only a few dissented, observing that many Kiwi employees (including tertiary qualified) had poor English, that some jobs did not require high language skills, and that computers compensated for limitations. Participants also described how they compensated for English language limitations such as not deploying those persons on customer front desk and telephone answering duties. Previous studies of employer perspectives confirm employers' concerns about communication in English: the Forsyte Research (1998) found English to be a reason for low success in finding employment and doing well in interviews; Benson-Rea et al (1998) identified lack of communication skills and English fluency as the two leading barriers to employing immigrants in the IT industry; in The Hudson Report (2006), 78 per cent of employers identified "non-technical skills" (predominantly interpersonal communication) as the most common challenge for immigrants; the Waikato Chamber of Commerce identified English as the biggest barrier to immigrant employment (*Waikato Times*, 30 September 2005); and the classroom study in Auckland in which employers who were MBA students discriminated against fictional CVs with non-English names, reasoning that communication problems were likely (*New Zealand Herald*, 2 April 2005).

In contrast, other research has suggested that English is of less importance. Asked about the attributes that made an immigrant employable, the 2003 Immigration Research Programme study found only 9 per cent of employers gave English as a key attribute for hiring an immigrant, and Wallis (2006a) reported that only 16 per cent of employers identified English or communication as a barrier to future recruitment of immigrants. However, it is noted that in these two studies of employer experiences of skilled immigrant employees recruited into areas of skills shortages, the immigrants were more likely to come from ESANA countries with some being on-shore applications. The present study explored experiences of employers who were faced with applications from immigrants from diverse countries of origin and those with a history of being unable to gain employment.

The other face of communication skills among immigrants from non-English speaking countries is the potential asset to a company of other languages spoken. Participants generally were more focused on the potential problems, not assets, of speakers of languages other than English, with only 15.2 per cent of survey respondents indicating they used language skills. The hospitality industry was most likely to use language skills, and two companies operating call centres utilised language skills of immigrant employees to service a diverse customer base. Companies trading internationally were no more likely than local and national businesses to employ immigrants because of language skills other than English, although some respondents whose companies had international business links commented on the added value of management and technical employees who spoke languages of trading partners (see also Watts and Trlin, 1999). Language attributes other than English, which could benefit businesses in better servicing their multicultural customer bases and international trading partners, were seldom recognised or used, as also shown by Watts and Trlin (1999). Similarly, only 49.5 percent of central and local government organizations employing NESB immigrants made use of those language skills (Watts and Trlin, 2000).

### *Cultural and organisational fit*

In the present study, the survey found that there appeared to be few problems in immigrant and Kiwi staff socially mixing: nearly 90 per cent of immigrant employees mixed with other staff, and nearly the same proportion of Kiwi employees mixed with immigrant employees. Yet in follow-up interviews, participants raised concerns in relation to immigrants about “fit”. Indeed, some saw that communication linked with culture was a barrier to employing immigrants; others had more concern about cultural fit than with skills; and a number were worried that immigrants could disrupt existing staff relations. Concerns were more pronounced about supervisory and managerial roles in relation to leadership style (e.g. immigrants could be

dictatorial). Others were troubled by the deferential attitude of some immigrants, especially those from some Asian countries. Participants seemed to prefer someone who would “assimilate”, “integrate”, and not be stand-offish or have attitudes of superiority. A few, however, claimed to enjoy the diversity and resulting interests and richness.

Experiences of poor cultural and organisational fit did not feature highly with employers in other studies. For example, of the 4 per cent of employers in Wallis’ (2006a) study who rated immigrant employees poorly, workplace culture was a reason for 18 per cent of poor performers. While 68 per cent reported no problems fitting in, 9 per cent reported problems fitting into the workplace, 6 per cent each reported problems with New Zealand culture generally and with cultural differences with co-workers. Employers in the 2003 Immigration Research Programme study reported that 11 per cent (n=39) of migrants had difficulty fitting in the workplace culture for reasons such as not understanding New Zealand culture and slang, and relationship and cultural difficulties with co-workers. Having no difficulty with cultural differences was a reason cited for good/very good performance by 6 per cent of employers while only 20 per cent of employers of the small number (93) of immigrant employees who faced difficulties in the job cited cultural differences, and 16 per cent cited lack of experience with workplace culture as a reason for poor performance (Immigration Research Programme, 2003).

#### *Recognition of overseas qualifications and skills*

Interview participants in the present study conveyed a strong preference for employees with local qualifications and experience. They gave reasons including a confidence the employee would “fit”, it was easier to verify qualifications and check work references, in a very competitive market an employee who would “hit the ground running” (most likely a New Zealander) was wanted, and a local employee would be familiar with the industry and have existing networks. The survey results confirmed these views: when recruiting, over 72 per cent said they were influenced by New Zealand work experience and nearly 67 per cent were influenced by New Zealand qualifications. Benson-Rea et al (1998) also identified lack of New Zealand experience as a barrier to immigrant employment in the IT industry. Immigrant job-seekers are familiar with these views, and in order to improve their employment chances, many have studied in New Zealand to up-skill or re-skill, and also have endeavoured to work in a voluntary capacity to gain the required work experience (Department of Internal Affairs, 1996; Firkin, 2004; Trlin, Henderson and North, 2004; New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004; Pio, 2005). However as interview participants were also wary of employing someone they perceived as over-qualified for a position, further study could compound a highly qualified immigrant’s difficulties, and some employers regarded voluntary work as potentially

burdensome or suspect. Some interview participants explicitly stated that immigrants were disadvantaged against New Zealanders.

Employers' preference for New Zealand qualifications and experience are a recognised barrier to labour market participation and social cohesiveness (e.g. Peace et al, 2005). An outcome of employers' practices that disadvantage and exclude immigrants from the labour market is that productivity of New Zealand businesses suffers and New Zealand is denied the benefits of a global market in skill (Hudson Report, 2006; *The Independent*, 24 November 1999, p.34). These lost opportunities brought about by "xenophobic" employers (*National Business Review*, 23 January 2004) are highlighted in the few large studies involving employers of immigrants. The 2003 Immigration Service study highlighted skills as the main contributor to immigrant employees' good performance: skills not available in New Zealand, sharing those skills with others, and transferable skills all featured strongly; only one per cent gave prior New Zealand experience as a reason for good performance. Employers also identified the main attributes for selecting an immigrant: skills not available in New Zealand and overseas work experience were cited by 35 and 34 per cent respectively, while New Zealand work experience and qualifications were cited by 5 and 3 per cent respectively; however, New Zealand recognised qualifications was a factor for 28 per cent. Employers in Wallis' (2006a) study were also influenced by New Zealand qualifications, and for 26 per cent having New Zealand recognized qualifications was a reason for immigrants getting a job. However, for 28 and 25 per cent respectively, having skills not available in New Zealand and having overseas experience were desired attributes, and possessing and sharing these skills with others in the workplace was cited as a reason for good job performance. Moreover, over half of the employers in Wallis' study reported they benefited more from employing an immigrant than would have been the case when employing a New Zealander, for reasons including contributing to organisational knowledge and skills, raising expertise, innovativeness and growth.

The degree of importance employers place on prior New Zealand work experience and qualifications when appointing immigrants, particularly at professional/managerial levels, is prejudicial to immigrants, and restricts their entry into the workforce. This conclusion is unavoidable given the generally positive perceptions of their immigrant employees as demonstrating high work ethic, adequate English and as positively contributing to the employing business, positive perceptions not only in the present study but in other New Zealand surveys of employers. The concerns voiced by Ip (1995) and Pool and Bedford (1997) regarding prejudicial attitudes towards immigrants were reflected in observations made by some employers in the present study who were themselves immigrants. Employers who perceived New Zealand businesses to be generally discriminatory suggested that such prejudice was rationalised as a concern about relationships with clients, and a misplaced emphasis on English language and company culture. As shown in

the findings of the present survey, these difficulties are seldom as intractable in experience as feared. Employers indicated that such problems as did from time to time arise were easily overcome, and that the benefits accruing to the business were generally greater than any liabilities. Although the experiences of immigrant employees are generally positive, indeed often highly positive, monocultural and assimilationist practices appear to persist in businesses, and were most evident at the point of recruitment.

## **Policies and support regarding the employment of immigrants**

Employers were asked to comment on policies and support for immigrant employees. Participants commented that many New Zealand businesses have neither the ability nor capacity to support potential immigrant employees, and there is seldom the spare capacity to assist in immigration applications and general support of immigrant families. The survey showed that when hired, few employers take special steps to ensure immigrants understand employment contracts, health and safety policies and the like: just over 17 and 19 per cent respectively used interpreter services and provided written material in languages other than English. Similarly, only small percentages had in place mentoring and buddy arrangements, or training for supervisors of immigrants. Interview participants indicated that such support was more frequent when immigrants were recruited and arrived directly from overseas; immigrants already in New Zealand seldom attracted support. The Hudson Report (2006) also found that few employers offered support to immigrant employees. While medium (20-200 employees) and large (> 200) sized companies were more likely to offer formal and informal support, this was still at low levels (just over 20 percent of medium companies offered such support, while for large companies 29 per cent offered formal and about 24 percent offered informal support). In comparison, 68 per cent of small (< 20 employees), 50 per cent of medium and 36 per cent of large companies did nothing.

In view of high employers concerns over English communication, the *New Zealand Herald* (12 January 2005) reported on a manufacturing company in Auckland providing a numeracy and literacy programme in company time for about 50 of its workers. In the present study, asked whether companies supported English language tuition, less than 12 per cent did so; some added that English language support is not a “core business” of companies. A few interview participants did support English tuition both for highly educated employees (e.g. scientists) and for low skilled employees. The rationales were for health and safety reasons, as pictorial guides and protocols only partly addressed concerns, and also to widen the pool of potential employees with required skills. An American study of the candy industry, where large numbers of immigrants find employment, identified such practices as:

the use of pictorial training manuals; employment of bilingual supervisors; ESL tuition support; and company manuals and other publications produced in multiple languages. In some cases the number of languages was said to be too large to translate manuals into all first languages (Henry, 1996).

These findings, that few businesses have policies in place either for recruiting immigrants to the workforce or for supporting immigrants once employed, were at first surprising considering that the objectives of current immigration policy encourages immigration of highly educated young people from any country, and supports cultural enrichment of society (Trlin, 1992). Indeed, in spite of employers' generally favourable attitudes and positive experiences in employing immigrants, such policies and practices as are in place tend toward integration and assimilation into the workplace culture, rather than foster diversity. Yet as Yeabsley (1997) points out we are now living in a time of globalisation where people are encouraged to move around and it is becoming easier to do so. (See also *National Business Review*, 7 November 2003, for a plea for employers to be more accepting of diversity.) The Office of Ethnic Affairs (2004) set out indicators for policy supporting the economic participation of "ethnic people", including finding and remaining in work appropriate to qualifications and experience, equal opportunities to work, cultural diversity being actively promoted and recognized as an asset in the workplace, and the contribution of the ethnic sector reflecting the ethnic diversity of New Zealand. The present study indicates that New Zealand employers have some way to go toward having policies in place to support diversity; indeed many appeared to be uneasy, even fearful, of diversity.

### **Employers' advice to immigrant job-seekers on making themselves employable.**

A survey of literature suggests that there has been very little inquiry into the employability of immigrants. A fundamental concern raised by some participants the issue of work and residency visas, identifying both the responsibilities of the immigrant job seeker, and bureaucratic difficulties employers encountered in trying to recruit or retain an immigrant. They described difficulties in understanding changing rules, demands on their time, and the risks of both prosecution if permits were not in order or losing a valued employee when difficulties could not be resolved. However, only 2 per cent of respondents in a recent survey identified having the right permits as a facilitating circumstance to hiring an immigrant (Immigration Research Services, 2003). Two recent reports from Immigration Research Programme (2003; Wallis, 2006a) indicate that policy changes have to some extent addressed employers' concerns regarding timeliness and streamlining.



While some researchers have pointed to the responsibility of Government and non-Government agencies in facilitating settlement and entry to the labour market, Greif (1995) argued that immigrants themselves must also prepare themselves for work. These sentiments were echoed by Knowles (1997) reporting from the perspective of the Employers' Federation, who stated that immigrants need to be readily employable when they arrive. Employers were therefore asked in the interviews how immigrants could improve their chances of employment. Participants emphasised the importance of immigrant job seekers preparing themselves well: researching the company and job they were applying for, tailoring the CV, ensuring the format of a CV was "Kiwi", having strong interview skills, dressing appropriately, having the right attitude -not too deferential, not too pushy, and so on. Some of these same issues were raised in a newspaper article "Job-seek tips for immigrants" advising immigrants on Kiwi expectations (*New Zealand Herald*, 30 June 2003), for example: that a CV is not too long, not too short, that it will highlight strengths, competencies and skills, and at an interview to behave as New Zealand employers prefer, such as looking interviewers in the eye. Survey respondents in Immigration Research Programme (2003) and Wallis (2006a) also highlighted the importance of "having the right attitude", by far the most important issue for employers, by which was meant showing a willingness to learn, enthusiasm and initiative, being hardworking (Immigration Services, 2003, p. 71), qualities that both enabled the immigrant to get the job in the first place and to retain the job. Participants also commented on the importance of their being able to verify qualifications and prior experience, and as raised by several commentators (*Dominion Post*, 8 November 2005; *New Zealand Herald*, 30 June 2003) the immigrant job seeker can help by having qualifications assessed by New Zealand Qualifications Authority, translating transcripts and certificates, and demonstrating how the overseas labour market is comparable to the New Zealand equivalent.

It can be argued that some of the above advice reflects assimilationist views: be like us and we might give you a job. Evidence for such attitudes is also reflected in other advice around verbal communication; for example, some participants noted the disadvantage which comes with speaking English with an accent and that colloquial Kiwi English is preferred. Job seekers are therefore advised to practice speaking English in the local vernacular and to work on their accent, and perhaps to anglicize or abbreviate their name (*New Zealand Herald*, 30 June 2003). An anglicised name does not, however, always overcome employer prejudice as reported in *The Press* (27 October 2004) and some participants in the present study found the practice off-putting. Furthermore, participants favoured behaviour and work practices with which they are familiar. Some commentators implicitly support such views, e.g. a *Waikato Times* (29 December 2004) article "Workshop to teach Koreans business the Kiwi way"; others advocated that employers need to change their attitudes to be more accepting of diversity (e.g. *Dominion Post*, 30 August 2003).

Participants also commented that their decision-making emphasized New Zealand qualifications and work experience, and advised immigrants to get that experience even when skills were being under-used. At the same time, some participants acknowledged that work experience is hard to get when many employers won't hire immigrants nor allow them to work voluntarily, and were unwilling to be seen to be exploitative by employing immigrants at lower levels. To overcome these barriers, immigrants have been reported to engage in study to get the desired New Zealand qualification, a practice participants in the present study observed. A few participants recommended choosing a course that involved work experience and simulated work practices such as an MBA. However, media and other reports suggest that even then immigrants may be unable to get a job interview, let alone a job (*Dominion Post*, 19 September 2002; 30 August 2003; *New Zealand Herald*, 14 August 2006; *The Press*, 27 October 2004). New Zealand work experience gained through a succession of temporary positions also may be ineffective (*New Zealand Herald*, 24 September 2004).

## CONCLUSIONS

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The findings of the study highlighted a paradox that has been reflected in other studies, the media and literature. The emigration of New Zealand talent combined with demographic ageing has led to serious and growing skills shortages necessary for economic growth; employers say they need skilled people and complain of shortages. Immigration policy over the last two decades has sought to address the need for skills by targeting young, skilled migrants, but employers systematically discriminate against immigrant job seekers, especially those from non-English speaking countries. Although employers claimed they were seeking to recruit the best skills possible, in practice it appeared that skills obtained by qualifying and working in New Zealand outweighed other considerations. The equally or in some cases better skilled immigrant might then be rejected for being over-qualified for the position, for not speaking English with a New Zealand accent, and because of fears the person would not “fit”. Participants in the interviews thus outlined the employer’s perspective on the disadvantages and barriers immigrants faced when seeking employment, describing how in practice one disadvantage compounded the next, and culminated in barriers to immigrant job seekers becoming almost insurmountable.

In light of the very high levels of satisfaction with immigrant employees, the fact that English was normally adequate for the job, and immigrants delivered a range of benefits to the company in addition to their labour and skills, an unavoidable conclusion is that immigrants face prejudice in breaking into the labour market. Other research has come to the same conclusion: The Hudson Report (2006) also found a high 77 per cent of employers believed there were barriers to immigrants. Unemployment and under-employment (at least initially) of immigrants, particularly immigrants of colour and from non-English speaking countries, has been found in other Western countries: in Australia (Miller and Neo, 1997); in the UK (Price, 2001); in Canada (Boyd and Thomas, 2001); and the USA (Chiswick, Cohen and Zach, 1997; Dong and Kleiner, 1999). However, in a study comparing countries, there appeared to be a greater bias against non-White immigrants in New Zealand than the other countries included (the USA, Canada and Switzerland) (Khan, 2004). Some commentators reported in the New Zealand media were very blunt in their conclusions: employers were described as discriminatory (*East & Bays Courier*, 27 July 2001); xenophobic (*National Business Review*, 23 June 2004); and frankly racist (*The Independent*, 24 November 1999; *The Press*, 27 October 2004).

There are a limited range of services that assist immigrants in entering the labour market including Work and Income, the New Zealand Immigration Service funded Auckland Chamber of Commerce NewKiwis scheme, community and ethnic groups

that support their own members, some local government migrant support schemes and some academic courses that include job placements (Ho et al, 2000; Auckland Chamber of Commerce, 2001-2005; *New Zealand Herald*, 30 June 2003; *Dominion Post*, 19 September 2002). While much of the focus has been on the immigrants themselves to take action to improve employability, as discussed above, the steps they take, often at high personal cost, are not guaranteed to lead to successful labour market participation.

A number of commentators agree that employers also need to change (e.g. Ho et al, 2000; The Hudson Report, 2006). Specifically, it is important that employers learn to recognise the value of the experience gained overseas, experience that is often of higher value than local experience; recognize the value of languages other than English; the cultural capital immigrant employers offer; and learn to value diversity as an asset. To this end, there have been a very limited number of resources prepared that employers can use to support an attitudinal shift. One example is the EEO Trust (2000) that has developed a set of resources to assist employers in developing policies and practices, including to support recruiting, that will support diversity in the workplace. Another is the Auckland Chamber of Commerce (2001-5) initiative that allows employers to trial immigrants at no cost to the company. In the context of a workplace, however, it is not only employers but employees collectively who would benefit; indeed, some participants excused their reluctance to appoint immigrants by their concern about upsetting existing employees. Workplaces and work groups, therefore, would benefit from appropriate policies that worked to support workplace diversity and which support the employment of the broad range of assets immigrant employees offer, tangible assets including language skills and cultural capital, networks with ethnic communities and with businesses in countries of previous employment, and less tangible assets including high work ethic and performance, commitment and loyalty. In addition there are published resources to assist managers in managing diversity in the workplace (e.g. Harris and Moran, 1996; EEO Trust, 2005), and management consultants who offer similar services.

Based on previous research and media reports reviewed above that highlight the widespread and continuing barriers immigrant job seekers face, and the apparently systematic discrimination that remains in spite of employers' widespread positive experiences with immigrant employees, the possibility of strengthening settlement policy needs to be considered. In the several years since they were first issued EEO (2000) and Office of Ethnic Affairs (2002) resources do not appear to have made a dramatic difference to immigrant employment. To break down the barriers employers have erected against immigrant job seekers there may be a place for rewards and/or sanctions, for example requiring businesses to report on their EEO policies and workplace diversity in the context of their local demography and customer/employee base. The education of employers might over time contribute to reducing aversion to employing immigrants.

The present and other studies reviewed point to the need for research into the labour market, employers and workplaces, to determine the extent, nature and dimensions of what appears to be systematic disadvantages faced by immigrants in the labour market (Borowski, 1993). Research is also needed to identify organisational practices that effectively reduce those barriers, policies that support diversity in relation to both recruitment and retention of employees, and programmes to support and integrate (not assimilate) immigrant employees and the assets they bring into the workplace.

At the same time, underemployment (reported in this study) and the unemployment of qualified immigrants appears to reflect a more complex set of issues than can be explained by prejudice alone. Possible explanations drawing on human capital theory, and subject to future research, are whether there are real differences between immigrant and native-born employees (Borowski, 1993). The concerns expressed by participants that could be researched more thoroughly include comparability between New Zealand and overseas qualifications, the impact of unfamiliarity with local business knowledge, the size of discrete labour markets for the professions and qualifications immigrants represent, the differences in the degree of specialization in those labour market between New Zealand and large overseas labour markets, language proficiency and communication, and cultural knowledge.

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# APPENDICES

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Appendix 1: Cover Letter

Appendix 2: Survey of Employers Questionnaire

## Appendix 1: COVER LETTER

		
<b><i>SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS CONCERNING THE EMPLOYMENT OF IMMIGRANTS</i></b>		<b>MASSEY UNIVERSITY</b>
Dear CEO / General Manager		Private Bag 11222 Palmerston North New Zealand Telephone +64-6-350 5194 Facsimile +64-6-350 5661
Your company is a company that has been selected from commercially available lists of New Zealand businesses (Top 500 Businesses, and Universal Business Directory).		<b>COLLEGE OF BUSINESS</b>
This survey is one part of a research programme into the experiences of immigrants settling in New Zealand. In the case of this questionnaire, we are asking about policy and practices of employers regarding immigrants in general, <b>excluding immigrants from the UK and Australia.</b>		 <b>DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS</b>
We are a team of four researchers at Massey University: Associate Professor Andrew Trlin, Dr Nicola North, Dr Regina Pernice, and Anne Henderson. The research programme is being funded by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology as part of the Public Good Science Fund.		
Could you please take about 20 minutes to work through the questions, and return the questionnaire in the Freepost envelope provided. If you do <b>not</b> wish to respond, please tick the appropriate box on the cover page of the questionnaire and return the uncompleted questionnaire, also in the Freepost envelope supplied.		
Nicola North is responsible for this Survey of Employers, and she can be contacted at:		
Department of Management Systems Massey University Tel: 06 350 4378 Fax: 06 350 5661 Email: N.H.North@massey.ac.nz		
Your response is confidential, and will not be traced to your company. Findings will be presented in aggregated form only.		
As far as we know, this is the first time that a survey of this kind has been conducted in New Zealand, and we expect that the results will be of interest to New Zealand business, as well as to immigration services and immigrants.		
Please return the questionnaire by <b>30 June 1998.</b>		
Thank you for your assistance.		
Yours sincerely		
		
Nicola North (Dr.)		

**MASSEY UNIVERSITY**

**NEW SETTLERS  
PROGRAMME**

**SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE**

**SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS**

attitudes, policies, practices and experiences  
concerning the employment of immigrants  
(excluding immigrants from the UK and Australia)

“I do not wish to respond to this questionnaire”

☐

*First, we would like to ask some questions about the practices and experiences of your company in employing immigrants.*

Please exclude immigrants from the UK and Australia.

1. Do you currently employ/have immigrants on your payroll?  
Yes  
No (If 'No', go to Question 25).
2. Please estimate the proportion **at present** of your company's workforce who are immigrants (*tick one box*)  
1-2% only  
3-10%  
11-25%  
26-50%  
51-100%
3. Please indicate which of the following best describes your immigrant workforce:  
Male & female about equal  
Mainly male  
Mainly female  
Don't know
4. Are these employees/workers: (*Tick all that apply*)  
Full-time permanent  
Full-time fixed term  
Part-time permanent  
Part-time fixed term  
On-call  
Piece-work  
Other (*please specify*)
5. Please indicate the category(ies) in which immigrants are currently employed in your company. (*Tick all that apply*)  
Managerial  
Professional  
Skilled trade  
Clerical/secretarial  
Semiskilled  
Unskilled
6. *If you ticked more than one category, in which **one** of the categories that you have ticked for Question 5 are most of your immigrant workers employed?*
7. Does your company tend to employ immigrants who are related or otherwise connected (eg through kinship, religion, ethnicity, etc)?  
Not at all  
Not normally  
Often  
Always  
Don't know



8. As far as you know, are the immigrant employees in your company using their premigration qualifications and skills?

Yes

No

Don't know (If no, please give an example)

9. Are you aware of immigrant employees in your company who have furthered or are furthering their occupational training/qualifications in New Zealand?

Yes

No

Don't know (If no, please give an example)

10. When appointing an immigrant applicant for a position, what influence does **New Zealand work experience** have on your decision?

Very strong influence

Strong influence

Some influence

Little influence

Very little influence

None

11. When appointing an immigrant applicant to a position, what influence does **New Zealand training/qualification** have on your decision?

Very strong influence

Strong influence

Some influence

Little influence

Very little influence

None

12. In your experience, how does the work ethic of immigrant employees compare with that of their "Kiwi" counterparts?

Immigrant employees are inclined to work harder/be more diligent

About the same

Immigrant employees are inclined to work less hard/ be less diligent

It depends on the immigrant group

Don't know/no opinion

Please explain your response

13. Please indicate the origins of your immigrant employees (*Tick all that apply*)

Pacific Islands

Europe (other than the UK)

North America

Latin America

Africa (**excluding** those of European descent)

Middle East (eg Saudi Arabia)

South Asia (eg India, Pakistan)

East Asia (eg China, Korea)

Southeast Asia (eg Vietnam, Malaysia)

Of those categories that you have ticked, which **one** would you say is the **most predominant**?

14. In general, would you describe the English language ability of your immigrant employees as adequate for the job they do?

Yes  
No  
Don't know

Please explain your response.

15. **What steps do you take** to ensure that **immigrants whose first language is not English** are familiar with employment contract conditions (including grievance procedures, access to workers' collectives, occupation safety and health regulations, company policies, machine operations, job procedures, etc).

- a. **Not applicable** (*Tick boxes that apply*)

Immigrant employees have English as first language  
Immigrant employees are fluent English speakers

- b. **Steps taken**

Explained personally by CEO or HR Manager  
Explained with help of an interpreter external to company  
Explained in presence of union representative or equivalent  
Explained by co-worker of same language background  
Explained with help of a support person nominated by the employee  
Written material provided (in English)  
Written material provided (in immigrants own language)

Any other comments

16. Are you aware of immigrant employees in your company who have sought or are seeking to improve their English language ability through English language tuition?

Yes  
No  
Don't know  
Not applicable

17. Have you appointed immigrant employees to your company **because of** their fluency in a language other than English?

Yes  
No  
Don't know  
Not applicable

If yes, please give an example

18. In general, to what extent do your immigrant employees attempt to mix **socially** with all other staff (eg mixing with them at meal and snack breaks, participating in organised social activities)?

Mix fully  
Sometimes mix  
Seldom mix  
Never mix  
Don't know

19. In general, to what extent do you 'Kiwi' employees attempt to **mix socially with immigrants**?

- Mix fully
- Sometimes mix
- Seldom mix
- Never mix
- Don't know

20. In general, would you say that English language communication limitations of immigrant employees pose difficulties in staff relationships in your organisation?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not applicable

If yes, please give an example

21. In general, to what level do your immigrant employees contribute to staff meetings or equivalent employee participation activities?

- High level
- Moderate level
- Low level
- Not at all
- Don't know
- Not applicable

22. Are your immigrant employees (**remember, excluding British and Australian**) involved in organised labour movements (eg trade unions)?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Not applicable

23. In general, what do you see as the benefits to your company of employing immigrants?

24. Is there anything else you would like to say about the experience of your company concerning the employment of immigrants?

*(Please go to Question 26)*

25. *If you answered 'No' to Question 1, to what extent do you agree with each of the following statements?*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Immigrants are an asset to a company					
Immigrants bring a useful dimension to decision-making					
Immigrants enrich organisational culture					
Immigrants contribute to a company's strategic objectives because of their different backgrounds					
Employing immigrants can create problems for a company					
It is a company's responsibility to make the most of benefits the immigrant offers					
Potential communication difficulties can discourage a company from employing immigrants					
The different beliefs and customs of immigrants can be difficult to accommodate					
Lack of relevant work experience among immigrant applicants discourages me from appointing immigrants					
Immigrant workers are very hard working					
Immigrant workers are very reliable					
Immigrant workers recruit other potential employees					
This company would willingly employ immigrants					
It makes no difference to this company whether a suitably qualified applicant is a 'Kiwi' or an immigrant					

***Please go to Question 26***

***Now we would like to ask you some questions about your company.***

26. Please state the activity that best describes your business (eg retailer, road transport, hotel, printing).

27. Please state the total number of employees currently in your company

- Less than 5
- Between 6-9
- Between 10-19
- Between 20-49
- Between 50-99
- Between 100-199
- Between 200-499
- Between 500-999
- 1000 and over

28. Which of the following **best** describes the scope of your business activity?

- Predominantly local
- Predominantly national
- Predominantly international
- Other (please specify)

29. If you have 'international' business activities, are these:

- With one country other than New Zealand?
- With two-five countries other than New Zealand?
- With over five countries other than New Zealand?
- Not applicable (please go to Question 31)

30. If you have international business activities, please list up to five countries with which you conduct business activities, beginning with the most important.

31. Does your company have an explicit policy on recruiting immigrants?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, what is that policy?

32. Does your company have an explicit anti-discrimination policy?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, what is that policy?

33. Does your company have explicit policies or practices on:

Yes                      No                      Not applicable

- Mentoring immigrant employees?
- Training immigrant employees?
- Coaching/training supervisors in working with immigrant employees?
- Translating training manuals and company policy into language(s) of immigrant employees?
- Supporting English language tuition?
- Any other comments

34. Does your company assist prospective immigrants applying under the General Skills Category (points system) by offering them jobs?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If yes, please give an example

35. Does your company experience shortages of specific occupational categories of workers which you seek to address by recruiting immigrants?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please specify the categories and describe the recruitment processes.

36. Were any of your immigrant employees appointed to their positions before they arrived in New Zealand?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please give an example

37. Is there anything else you would like to say about immigrants and their employment in New Zealand?

***Finally we could like to ask a few questions about the CEO/General Manager***

38. Gender:

Male  
Female

39. Age

29 years or less  
30-39 years  
40-49 years  
50-59 years  
60 years and over

40. Country of birth

New Zealand  
Other (specify)

41. Ethnicity (specify)

42. Does the CEO/General Manager have overseas work experience?

Yes  
No  
Don't know

43. Language(s) spoken other than English (please specify)

***Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview?***

Yes  
No

If yes, please give contact details

***If you would like a summary of findings please tick ☐ and write your address below:***

***Thank you for taking the time to respond to the questionnaire.***

## **FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS WITH EMPLOYERS ON PRACTICES AND POLICIES REGARDING THE EMPLOYMENT OF IMMIGRANTS**

Thank you very much first for taking the time to return the questionnaire on the subject, and secondly for agreeing to give more of your time in a follow-up interview.

I expect the interview to take no longer than 30 minutes, and if you agree would like to tape-record it (for accuracy and completeness of the record). You will not be identified by name or by company details, unless you give your permission. The tape will be wiped as soon as the interview is typed up.

### ***THE QUESTIONS I INTEND TO PUT TO YOU ARE:***

1. In your view what can immigrants, particularly skilled and professional/managerial levels, do to make themselves more employable? In particular, how can recent immigrants gain the New Zealand work experience often preferred by employers?
2. What can companies do to facilitate the settling in of immigrant employees and enable both employee and company to benefit?
3. What are the particular assets that immigrant employees can bring to their employing companies?

We are also interested in exemplars of companies which have found solutions to some of the problems in employing immigrants, and which have established sound policies and practices in employing immigrants. If you believe you can assist us, please provide documentation and examples which illustrate your company's achievements in this area.

## AUTHOR

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### **Nicola North**

The Principal Investigator for this survey, Nicola was a founding member of the New Settlers Programme and is currently Associate Professor and Post-Graduate Co-ordinator in the School of Nursing, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland. Having formerly lectured in the Business Studies Faculty, Massey University, where she ran the post-graduate programme in health services management, Nicola has been involved in research on health systems and health workforce issues over many years. Reflecting her enduring research interest in international migration and its impacts on both the migrant and the host society, her PhD thesis explored aspects of the health of Cambodian refugees in New Zealand. Nicola is the Principal Investigator for the New Zealand Cost of Nursing Turnover study, and a researcher in the Te Riu o Hokianga programme.



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